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Cinema speakers
Jamo's THX D 600 array is made for Blu-ray! See p50

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■ 10 bigscreen TVs ■ JVC X90 projector ■ Chord power amp



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SPACE BABE
Barbarella looks better than ever on Blu-ray, p100



ON TEST
Epson EH-TW9000 projector
Sony STR-DN1030 AVR
REL T5 subwoofer

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Echostar's ultra-thin PVR breaks the size barrier! p58



Power perfection

Chord's high-end 5.1 amplifier rated

Whole lotta Loewe

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■ TOTAL RECALL

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As one of the first premium loudspeaker brands to partner with THX, Jamo has enjoyed more than 15 years of continued home theatre success since the introduction of the Jamo Cinemaster.

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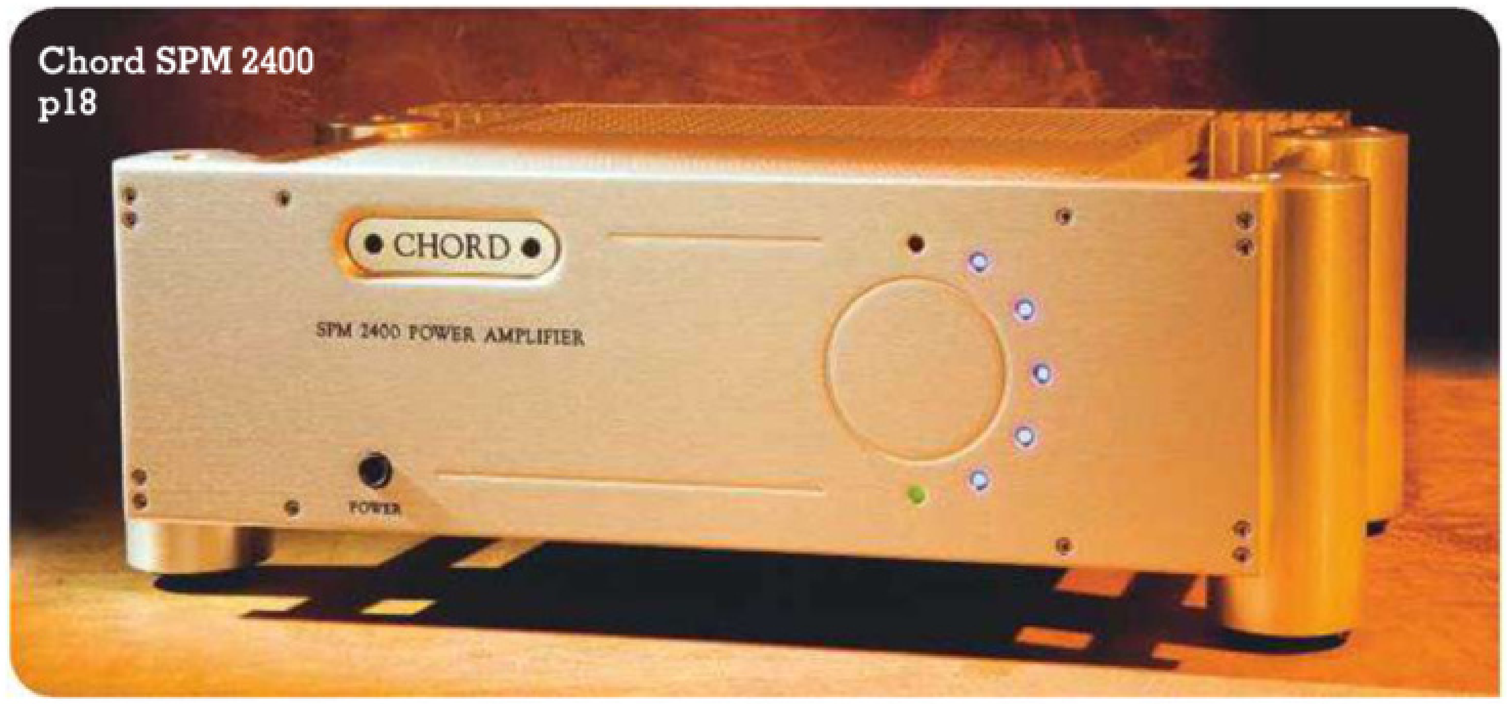
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WELCOME



We've said it before and we'll no doubt say it again, but when it comes to home cinema, bigger definitely is better. The whole point of being an AV-holic is to get a domestic experience that rivals the one from your local multiplex – and that means serious hardware.

With that in mind, this issue **we've hunted down some monster components that will bring a real step-up in performance to your setup**, including JVC's flagship X90 projector, Chord's astonishing SPM 2400 power amplifier and Jamo's heavyweight D 600 THX Ultra2 speakers. Each of these has a considerable price tag attached, but the investment is definitely worth it.

At the other end of the scale, we check out Echostar's HDT-610R – the world's thinnest Freeview HD PVR – and entry-level receivers from Yamaha and Sony. In fact, whatever size your system, we've got you covered...

Editor
Mark Craven



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WANT MORE?
Point your browser at homecinemachoice.com for even more news and reviews

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Our team of expert writers are the best-qualified in the business

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Adrian Justins: Made his name as the editor of *What Video & TV* and *What Home Cinema*





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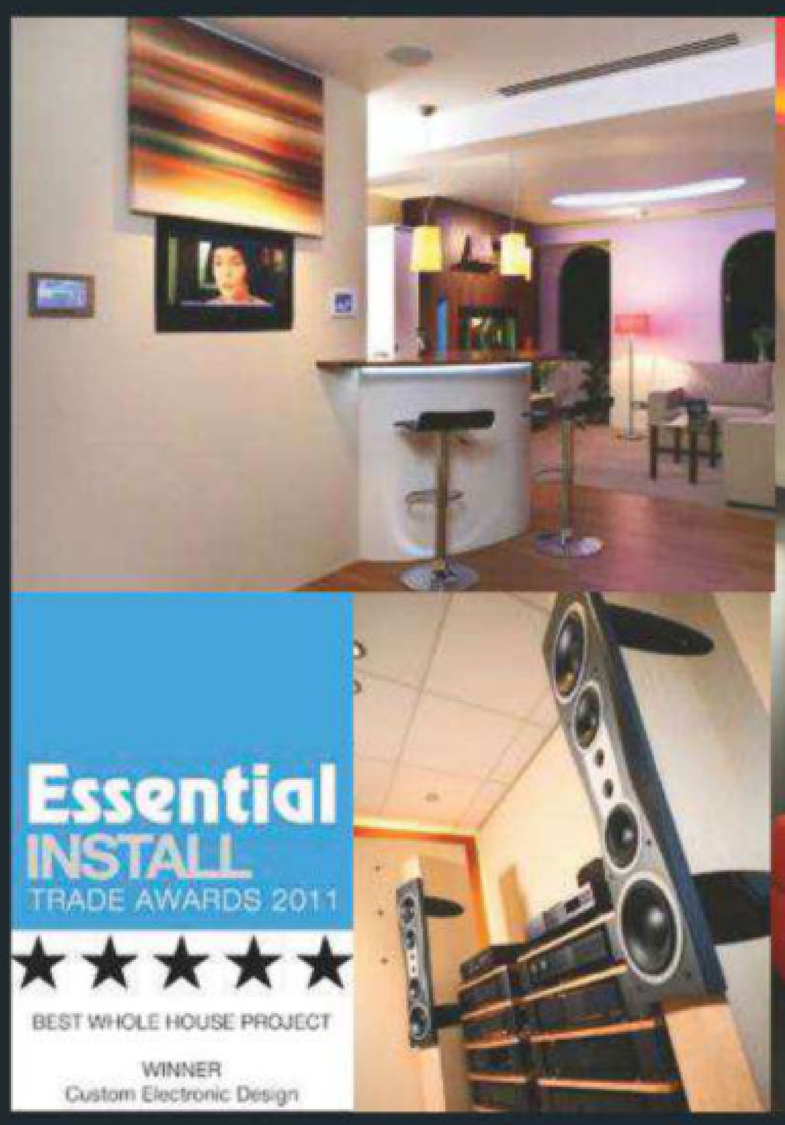
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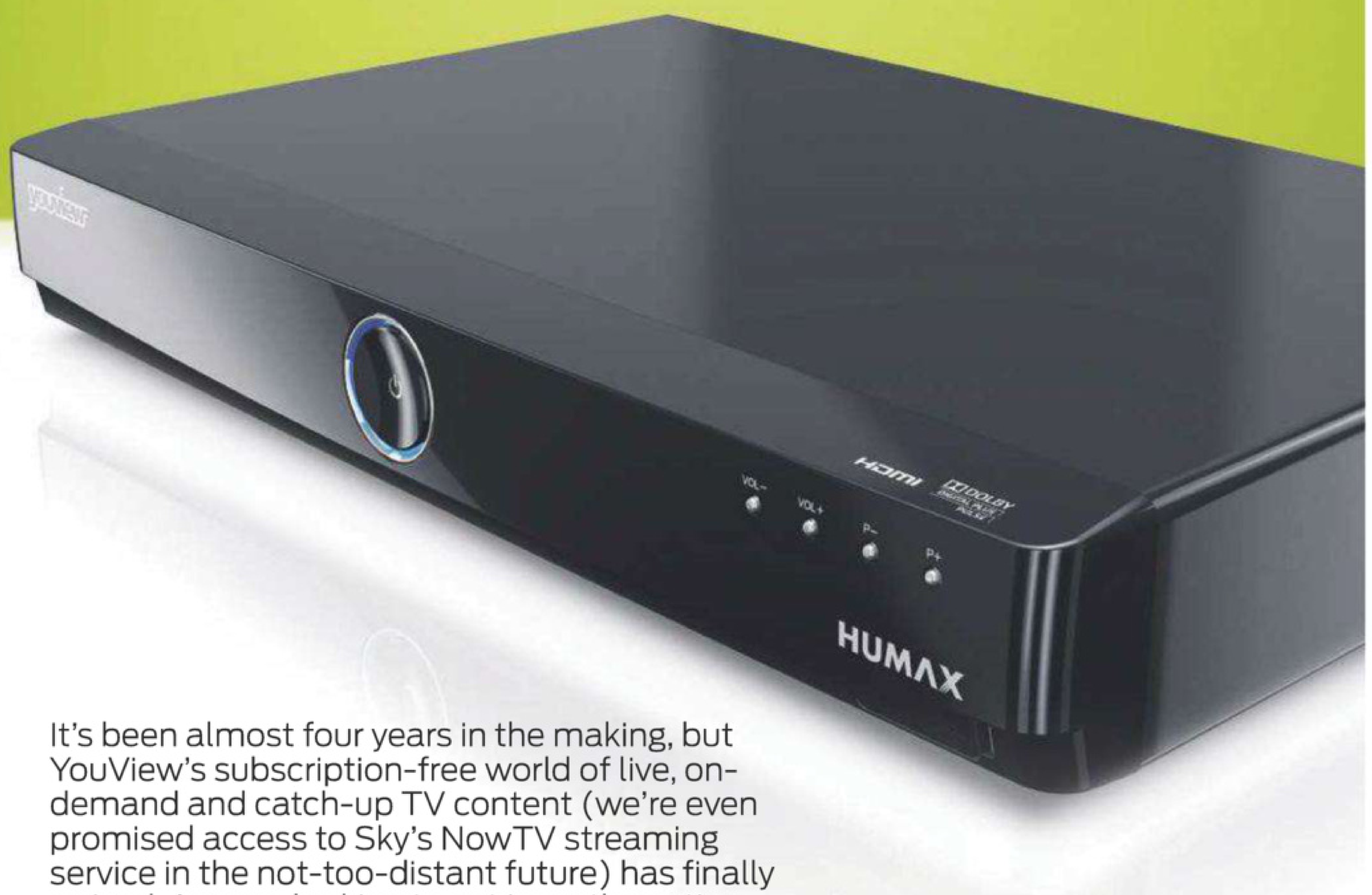
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BULLETIN

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YouView arrives!

Humax DTR-1000 → www.humaxdigital.com/uk/youview



It's been almost four years in the making, but YouView's subscription-free world of live, on-demand and catch-up TV content (we're even promised access to Sky's NowTV streaming service in the not-too-distant future) has finally arrived. Anyone looking to get in on the action straight away will want to check out Humax's £300 DTR-1000 set-top box, which acts as a gateway to YouView's IPTV service and functions as a digital TV recorder with storage space for up to 125 hours of hi-def content.

HCC Online...
Looking for breaking AV news, blogs, features, & reviews? For your daily fix visit us at www.homecinemachoice.com
Follow us on Twitter @hccmag

Dream team

Marantz SR5007 & UD5007 → www.marantz.co.uk

It's not often we use the word 'gorgeous' to describe AV kit, but we can't think of any other way to sum up Marantz's new matching SR5007 AV receiver and UD5007 universal Blu-ray player. Priced around £700, the SR5007 delivers 100W across each of its seven channels, 4K video upscaling and a variety of networking facilities for audio streaming (including AirPlay). Meanwhile, the £500 UD5007 features an advanced disc mechanism for 'whisper-quiet' performance, DLNA media streaming and access to Netflix's movie-on-demand service. Black finishes are also available.

High-end AVRs



August sees the UK debut of three new beefy AVRs from Onkyo. The £3,000 9.2-channel TX-NR5010 (pictured), £2,500 9.2-channel TX-NR3010 and 7.2-channel TX-NR1010 are all THX Ultra2 Plus-certified and feature 4K upscaling, while the top two benefit from 11.4-channel pre-outs with DTS Neo: X 11-channel up-mixing (a world first, apparently).

The TX-NR5010 adds a massive toroidal transformer, supported by two discrete transformers, for audio and video processing, plus gold-plated terminals and speaker posts.
www.onkyo.co.uk

Ultra-thin audio



Yamaha is setting out to raise the (sound)bar. and break the price barrier with its latest one-box Soundbar Surround System. The company claims that the ultra-thin YAS-101 takes just five-seconds to set up and features a built-in 60W subwoofer, Air Surround Xtreme tech delivering '7.1 channels of highly accurate surround sound' and UniVolume functionality that eliminates spikes in volume (such as those experienced during ad breaks). The YAS-101 costs £230 in black and £260 for the premium silver finish.
http://uk.yamaha.com

Denton returns



British loudspeaker brand Wharfedale is celebrating its 80th anniversary this year, and is marking the occasion by refreshing its classic Denton bookshelf speaker. While the hand-veneered mahogany cabinet is as 'traditional' as they come, the inside of the Denton 80th Anniversary Edition is bang up to date, employing a woven Kevlar cone and rigid die-cast chassis in the bass unit, with a textile soft dome tweeter and high-flux ferrite magnet handling high frequencies. This limited edition model will set you back around £500 per pair.
www.wharfedale.co.uk

Sony makes TVs Smarter

Searching for a really Smart television? You need Google TV

Whether you call it Smart TV v2.0, or a belated land-grab for the interactive living room, the second-generation Google TV has finally launched in the UK. Sony's diminutive NSZ-GS7 gizmo promises to bring Smart(er) TV functionality to any hi-def TV. According to Google TV's head of global distribution Suveer Kothari, the technology delivers the full freedom of the Internet to the TV for the first time.

'That's what users have told us they want the most,' he confided to *HCC*. Google TV incorporates a bespoke, fully-functional Chrome browser, enabling viewers to integrate live TV with the internet on one screen, without having to switch inputs. 'It delivers what people think they get when they buy a Smart TV – but never do.'



Suveer Kothari: 'It delivers what people expect to get from Smart TV, but never do.'

Honeycomb Android

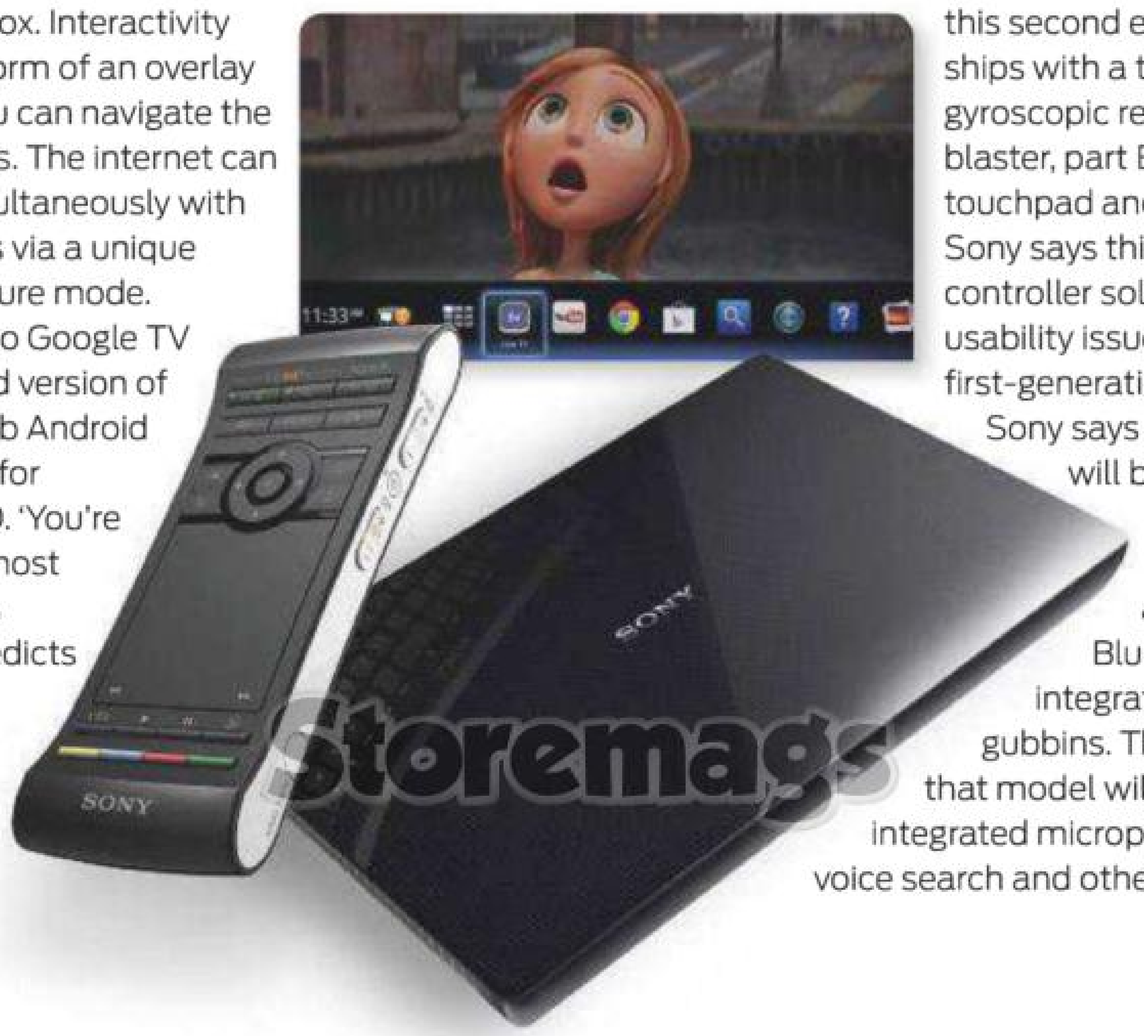
The NSZ-GS7 doesn't actually feature a TV tuner. Instead it offers an HDMI loopthrough from any other set top box. Interactivity comes in the form of an overlay from which you can navigate the 'net or run apps. The internet can be viewed simultaneously with live broadcasts via a unique Picture-in-Picture mode.

The secret to Google TV is a customised version of the Honeycomb Android OS, optimised for widescreen HD. 'You're going to see a host of applications developed,' predicts Kothari. While there is no hard drive storage capacity in the box, there is 8GB reserved for downloaded apps. At launch around 150 dedicated Google TV apps are available, but reflecting Google's limited American availability to date they're distinctly US-centric, and include clients for CNN Money and *The Wall Street Journal*.

However, Google TV does come with a super-slick iteration of YouTube. While the Google TV team conceded that YouTube is widely available on other devices, 'it's a much more integrated experience on Google TV.' Kothari also predicts a boom in multi-screen gaming apps.

Unlike the first generation of Google TV products which launched in America during 2010, this second edition ships with a twin-sided, gyroscopic remote. Part IR blaster, part Bluetooth touchpad and part keypad, Sony says this innovative controller solves the many usability issues that blighted first-generation hardware.

Sony says the NSZ-GS7 will be joined in October by the NSZ-GP9, a £300 3D Blu-ray player with integrated Google gubbins. The handset for that model will also boast an integrated microphone, enabling voice search and other functionality.



The NSZ-GS7 set-top box retails for around £200

Storemags

Playlist...

Team *HCC* reveals its Playback picks of the last month

The Muppets (All-region BD)



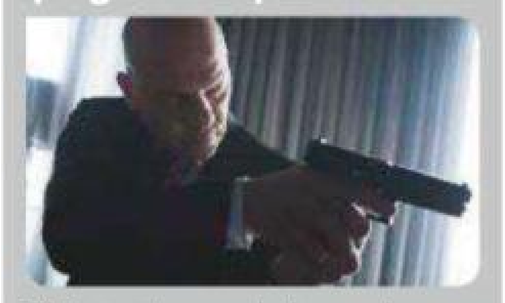
Great gags, great songs and great AV ensure this disc gets plenty of encores in our home cinemas

The Dark Knight (All-region BD)



The recent cinema release of *The Dark Knight Rises* had us dying to watch this superb Blu-ray again

Braquo: Season 2 (Region B BD)



Things get even darker and more violent in this second series of the French answer to *The Shield*

Welcome to the Space Show (Region B BD)



The dazzling Studio Ghibli-esque anime shines even brighter on this excellent hi-def platter

Red Dead Redemption (Xbox 360/PS3)



After finishing *Max Payne 3* we couldn't resist diving back into Rockstar's earlier cinematic homage to the Wild West

Tech Diary

Our calendar is here to make sure you don't miss out...

→JULY

30: The Night Porter
Liliana Cavani's controversial 1974 film about the sadomasochistic relationship that develops between a former concentration camp inmate and her Nazi torturer makes its debut on Blu-ray in the UK today.
www.anchorbay.co.uk

→AUGUST

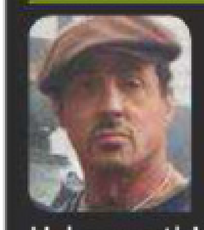
3: Brave



Pixar takes to the Scottish Highlands for its latest animated feature. Opening at UK cinemas today, the 3D 'toon tells the story of a princess who refuses to follow tradition and sets out on a mystical adventure instead.
www.disney.co.uk

9: Boop-Oop-A-Doop
Animated saucepot and National Legion of Decency-botherer Betty Boop made her unusual screen debut as an anthropomorphic French poodle in the 1930 Fleischer Studios short *Dizzy Dishes*, on this date in 1930.

13: Headhunters
This Norwegian film adaptation of Jo Nesbro's crime novel picked up excellent reviews during its cinema run. Find out what all the fuss was about when it comes to DVD and BD in the UK today.
www.momentumpictures.co.uk



17: The Expendables 2
Stallone! Statham! Li! Lundgren! Norris! Couture! Van Damme! Crews! Helmsworth! Willis! Schwarzenegger. UK cinemas! Today! We! Can't! Wait!
www.lionsgatefilms.co.uk

20: Puppet Master
Cult UK label 88 Films makes its first foray into the world of Blu-ray with this feature-packed release of the 1989 shocker about psychic investigators running afoul of killer puppets in a deserted hotel.
www.88films.co.uk

23: HCC #212
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www.homecinemachoice.com

High-end retailer re-opens

KJ West One overcomes disaster to showcase the best in AV kit

When distributor Absolute Sounds was on the lookout for a central London venue for the UK launch of Wilson Audio's new £200,000 Alexandria XLF speakers, a serendipitous solution presented itself with the long-awaited re-opening of high-end specialist KJ West One.

Located on New Cavendish Street, KJ West One is a haven for fans of high-end AV. Those who enter the glass-fronted store are immediately surrounded by the best in *avant-garde* high-end audio esoterica, from the D'Agostino Momentum Monoblock Power Amplifier to Metronome Technologie's Kalista Integrated CD player.

'It's almost as if KJ West One has to be the ambassador for high-end audio, because it's made up of brands that most people just don't know exist,' company director Steve Wilcock tells *HCC*, when we caught up with him following the Wilson Audio launch.

Water way to go

KJ West One had a fairly humble beginning in 1968 as KJ Leisure Sound, a mail-order company operating out of the slightly less glamorous location of Watford. The company made the move into 'bricks and mortar' retailing in 1972, and proceeded to open a total of seven stores. However, after a series of management buyouts, the company was left with just its flagship store, then located on London's Wigmore Street. 'It was at this point that KJ decided to focus specifically on the high-end market,' says Wilcock, and in 1988 the store moved to its current location.

The biggest shake-up for KJ West One happened in 2005, we're told. 'On September 13, the store manager at the time opened the shop up, came down to the lower ground floor and found four-inches of water completely covering the whole area'.

It was a huge blow for the company, and one compounded by difficulties surrounding the insurance claim. 'It actually became a third-party claim, and that was extremely complicated because the source of the leak was through a contractor doing the plumbing to the apartment above. We were left with a long, protracted claim. In fact, it was only settled in February 2010!'

Dave Wilcock: 'I don't think people mind spending large amounts on this sort of kit'

High-end rebirth

While a five-year closure might have sunk other stores, KJ ended up seeing it as an opportunity to completely redevelop. 'We've created three new demonstration rooms, one on the ground floor and two on the lower ground floor,' states Wilcock. 'All of them are capable of providing five-channels of audio, while Studio 3 downstairs is a dedicated boutique cinema, which we're presently running exclusively with Steinway [Lyngdorf].'

According to Wilcock, the demo facilities are key to the KJ West one shopping experience. 'People come in with a preconceived idea of what they would like and quite often go out with something quite different. Just last week a customer came in with a fixation for a specific type of speaker. He listened to four different types of speakers here and ended up choosing something completely different. And we're talking about speakers costing around £25,000 per pair'.

Although the complete refurbishment ended up costing more than originally expected ('in excess of £350,000'), it did allow the company to do more than merely remodel the store. 'The wires coming in from the road have been re-done, each studio now has its own dedicated mains distribution and we integrated everything in the store through Savant [intelligent control]'.

The result speaks for itself. KJ West One has risen from the slightly soggy ashes of its previous incarnation to provide a delicious high-end AV retail experience bang in the middle of London. Add this to the recently-opened tech zone in Harrods and it's clear that bricks 'n' mortar AV, at the high-end, isn't dead yet.





Demo rooms are key to the KJ experience

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«Rewind

What was hot in home cinema a decade ago?

Find out as we peel back the pages on the Sept 2002 issue of *HCC*...

'Absolute power!' screamed the cover of the mag in celebration of the arrival of B&W's Signature 800 speakers. 'Quite simply beautiful,' said our reviewer, who clearly thought the system tested was well worth the £15,000 ticket.



Also reviewed was the Panasonic DMR-HS2, a state-of-the-art piece of kit combining a DVD-RAM recorder with a 40GB(!) HDD and 'timeslip' capabilities.

Elsewhere, contributors David Murphy and Steve Keaton were investigating the importance of lighting in cinema rooms.

And if that wasn't enough excitement for one issue, we also put brand-new 32in TVs from Sony and Sanyo against one another in a head-to-head test. And you'll never guess which came out on top. Actually you probably can...

The time isn't right for 4K

Epson talks technology old and new at its 70th anniversary bash

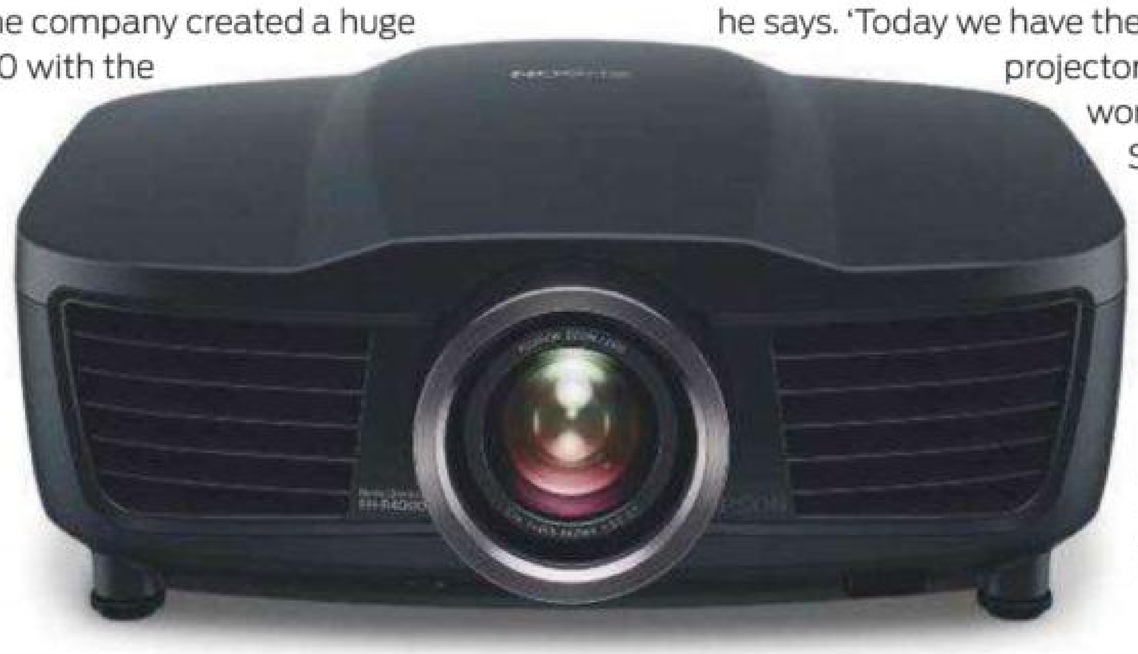
Leading home cinema projector brand Epson has told 4K optimists to cool their jets. Speaking exclusively to *HCC* at a shindig to celebrate the company's 70th anniversary, category manager Graeme Davidson scotched hopes of a 4K launch at this year's IFA tech expo. 'Obviously our engineers are aware of the potential of Quad HD, but there is no content. So does the market really need 4K at the moment? We don't think so – the time isn't right.'

Epson has a history of pushing the envelope with projection technologies. However, it waited until late 2011 before bolstering its home cinema range with 3D-compatible models.

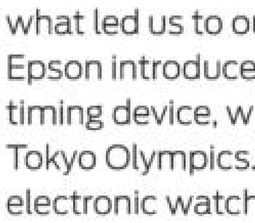
Davidson is tight-lipped about what we can expect at IFA, although he did hint that a second generation of the brand's Moverio mobile viewing glasses is being fast-tracked. 'There are so many projects going on in the background,' he says. 'You can guarantee that the guys in Japan are working on something that will take transmissive LCD to another level'.

Reflecting on the past

Perhaps Epson has good reason to be wary of new tech. The company created a huge buzz at IFA 2010 with the EH-R4000, a high-end projector built-around unproven reflective LCD technology. Demos were dramatic – however, the product never came to market, proving too difficult to manufacture. 'All the working EH-R4000 samples were made by hand,' confides Davidson, 'but when it went into mass-production the technology could never deliver the quality required to satisfy our engineers.'



EH-R4000: This high-end LCD projector never made it to the market



Graeme Davidson: 'Does the market really need 4K at the moment? We don't think so'

Epson started life in 1942 as a watch components manufacturer named Daiwa Kogyo. With a staff of just nine employees, it worked out of a modified Miso storehouse. Today it employs 75,000 people in 97 companies around the world.

'Making those watch parts is the most important part of our heritage,' explains Tony Petford, VP of Sales. 'We got very good at making small, electro-mechanical devices. And that's what led us to our printing technology.' In 1964 Epson introduced the first portable printing, timing device, which made its debut at the Tokyo Olympics. 'We then got involved in the first electronic watches, which led us to LCD displays,' he says. 'Today we have the biggest LCD projector factory in the world (located in Shenzen, China). 25 per cent of all projectors built are ours.'

EZ networking



Iomega has introduced a new feature-rich NAS drive that it claims offers the easiest way yet to backup, share and access files on your home network. The Iomega EZ Media & Backup Centre is available in 1TB, 2TB and 3TB models, priced between £150 and £260, and comes bundled with free-of-charge Iomega Personal Cloud access. It also boasts a three-step setup (no CD required), built-in DLNA-certified UPnP AV Media Server and ITunes Server, and torrent support for quick downloading of large files without the need for a PC.
www.iomega.com

House of horrors



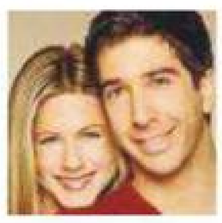
Five college kids take a trip to an isolated cabin for a weekend of 'fun and games' – it's an idea we've seen repeated hundreds of times in horror films. But have you ever stopped and wondered why? Joss Whedon and Drew Goddard clearly have and, as a result, cooked up the spectacularly inventive *The Cabin in the Woods*, which hits Blu-ray and DVD in the UK on September 24. Extras include a commentary, *Making of...* documentary, three featurettes and a Q&A with the filmmakers. The Blu-ray also benefits from a Bonus View mode.
www.lionsgatefilms.co.uk

Hi-def Hitch box



It's taken a couple of years, but Universal Pictures is finally following up on its 2010 Blu-ray release of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. October 1 sees the UK release of *Alfred Hitchcock: The Masterpiece Collection*. Priced around £150, this epic Blu-ray boxset features 14 of Hitch's classic thrillers (running the gamut from *Saboteur* to *Family Plot*) remastered in hi-def. The set also promises all of the extras from the DVD versions of the films, plus art cards and an exclusive collectible book containing costume sketches, photos, correspondences and more.
www.universalpictures.co.uk

I'll be there for Blu



Warner Home Entertainment will be bringing all 236 episodes of hit sitcom *Friends* to Blu-ray later this year. We're still waiting for confirmation of the UK release date, but we can reveal that the 21-disc boxset will debut in the US on November 13, priced around $280. Shot on film, the episodes have been digitally remastered and reformatted in 1.78:1 widescreen for the hi-def release. A trio of newly produced retrospective documentaries join previously available extras, including commentaries on selected episodes and five featurettes.
www.warnerbros.co.uk

This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



News x10

1 Global TV decline

Worldwide shipments of TVs dropped eight per cent (down to 51.2million units) during the first quarter of 2012, according to new data released by NPD DisplaySearch. The biggest contributor to the drop was in LCD TVs, with numbers falling for the first time in the history of the category. However, there was good news for Samsung, which remained the top-selling brand with a 26 per cent market share.

2 TromaTube

Legendary B-movie purveyor Troma has decided to celebrate its 40th anniversary by making 96 of its cult films available for free via its YouTube channel. Highlights include all four *Toxic Avenger* flicks, *Tromeo & Juliet*, *Cannibal! The Musical* and *A Nymphoid Barbarian in Dinosaur Hell*.

3 Cinema suffers

The latest results from Edelman's annual study into entertainment trends has highlighted the plight currently faced by cinemas. Only one per cent of UK respondents cited cinema/movies as a 'frequent source of entertainment', down from seven per cent in 2011 and 12 per cent in 2010. The results from US respondents dropped from 28 per cent to three per cent over the same time period.

4 BT scores football deal

BT has secured the shared rights to live Premier League football alongside BSkyB in a new deal worth over £3billion that runs from 2013-2016. The company has said that it will launch a dedicated channel to show its 38 matches. The news comes as a major blow to US sports broadcaster ESPN, which currently shares the screening rights with BSkyB.

5 High street woe continues

Despite reports of a slight rise in sales during the last financial quarter, Dixons Retail (owner of Currys and PC World) has revealed that it will have to close more stores than originally expected in order to make the necessary cost savings over the next two years.

6 OLED partnership official

Following weeks of speculation and the impending arrival of a 55in OLED TV from Korean rival LG, Japanese AV giants Sony and Panasonic confirmed that they have signed an agreement regarding the joint development of large-sized OLED panels for use in both company's next-generation TVs. Hurrah!

7 Now Fox loves LOVEFiLM

20th Century Fox has signed a new deal with LOVEFiLM, giving the service exclusive on-demand access to the studio's library during 'the second pay TV window' (in other words, after Sky Movies, but before regular TV channels). Last year's blockbusters will start arriving on the streaming service from March 2013, which gives you enough time to watch the entire back catalogue of Fox's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, *Prison Break* and *24*, as these have just been added to the service.

8 Three strikes

Ofcom has proposed a new 'three strikes' policy to deal with internet piracy. Under the ruling, UK-based ISPs will be forced to send letters to any of their customers accused of downloading pirate material. And anybody who receives three such letters in a year will have anonymous information about their downloading and sharing history sent to copyright holders, who could use it to take legal action. The new policy could come into effect by March 2014.

9 The high cost of standby

A new report on household energy usage in the UK commissioned by the Energy Saving Trust claims that TVs and other electrical products that are plugged in, but not in use or left in standby mode, cost the UK up to £1.3billion in electricity bills every year.

10 Vintage 3D goes BD

Warner Bros has started raiding its extensive vault of classic films in order to bolster its lineup of 3D Blu-ray titles. According to EVP and GM of theatrical catalog Jeff Baker, 'the Warner library has the largest number of classic 3D titles of any studio. But not until now has the technology been perfected to the point where we can release them.' First up is a 4K restoration of Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder*, which hits 3D Blu-ray in the US on October 9.



Premiere

HCC's guide to what's happening in the world of TV and films...

More Monsters

Tom Green, director of several episodes of the cult TV series *Misfits*, has been picked to helm the sequel to Gareth Edwards' low-budget sci-fi hit *Monsters*. According to early reports, you can expect the plot to have more of an *Apocalypse Now* vibe...

Jurassic Park not extinct after all



Rise of the Planet of the Apes scribes Rick Jaffa and Amanda Silver are working on a script for a fourth *Jurassic Park* film. As with the third, Steven Spielberg will only produce the film, not direct it.

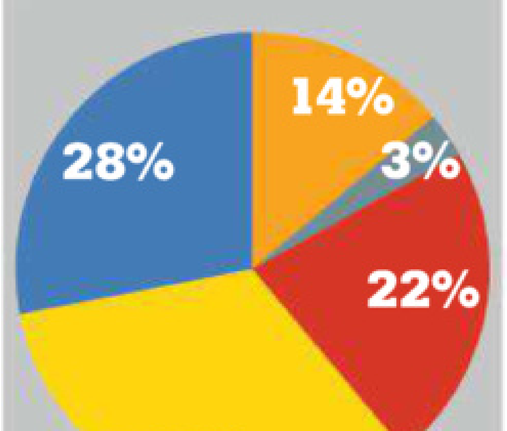
Sci-fi sex symbol

Drive director Nicholas Winding Refn is bringing '60s sexbomb Barbarella to the small screen. The acclaimed filmmaker will both direct and produce the series, stating that '[She's] one of the ultimate counter-cultural characters... I look forward to bringing this unique character to life for a new generation of fans.'

We asked...

Which part of your home cinema system have you spent the most cash on?

- AVR/amplifier/processor
- BD/DVD player
- Television
- Loudspeakers
- Projector



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
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Hero worship

Avengers Assemble → Walt Disney Home Entertainment → All-region BD/R2 DVD

Having smashed their way into the record books at cinemas around the world, Captain America, Thor, Iron Man, Black Widow, Hulk and Hawkeye have now set their sights set on conquering your living room. *Avengers Assemble* hits DVD and BD (2D and 3D) in the UK on September 17, with the latter shaping up to be particularly heroic thanks to the inclusion of a 90-minute *Making of...* doc.







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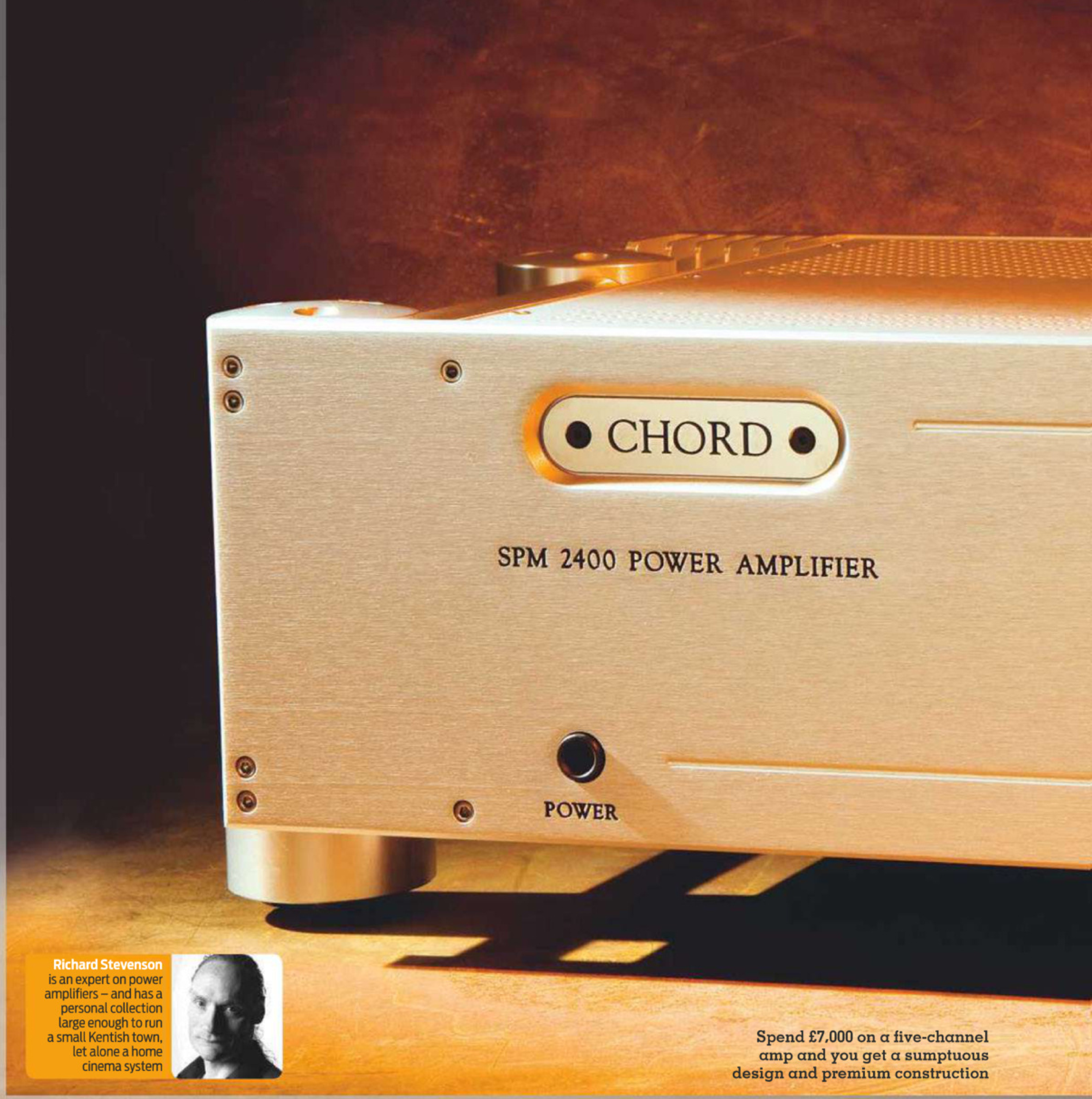
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HIGH END HERO

CHORD ELECTRONICS SPM 2400 → £7,000 APPROX

If you want serious, high-end home cinema sound a dedicated power amp is the way to go. Chord's SPM 2400, handmade and steeped in audiophile history, would make a smart choice...



Richard Stevenson is an expert on power amplifiers – and has a personal collection large enough to run a small Kentish town, let alone a home cinema system

Spend £7,000 on a five-channel amp and you get a sumptuous design and premium construction

MONSTER SPECIAL

At nearly £7,000, the SPM 2400 is Chord Electronics' entry-level multichannel amplifier. Yes, this is a brand that operates largely at the stratospheric end of the audio industry, and has carved out a very prestigious name for itself with professional studios and well-heeled audiophiles alike. 'Carved out' is also a fitting phrase to describe the cosmetics of its lineup, too. Chunky, sculptured craftsmanship, laid out in an eye-watering vista of milled and sumptuously-finished aluminium is the order of the day.

The relatively *bijou* SPM 2400 is a delight to behold and, sat in my cinema room next to other manufacturers' hardware, looks like a piece of fine artwork in a sea of metal boxes. I have seen Chord's products at exhibitions for over two decades but it is not until you get these components home that you realise just how absolutely lush they are. And what is underneath the metalwork is equally impressive.

You have to rummage around in the history of Chord's founder and chief designer John Franks to understand the brand's design ethos. As a young engineer, Franks produced very efficient and robust power supplies for the demanding avionics industry, and began designing a power supply that would eliminate the inherent issues with typical audio transformers, including distortion caused by high-current feeding back into the ground loop of the amplifier. A decade of refining and developing later and the result was a high-speed switch-mode power supply in the 1989 Chord SPM 900 stereo >



HOME CINEMA Choice *Reference Status*

HIGH END HERO



power amplifier. There have been further refined iterations of this power supply technology in every major Chord product since.

It's clever stuff and Chord's flagship power supply (found in the über-expensive Reference range) is capable of delivering some 4,000W, if your own mains supply can handle it. To achieve the same level from a traditional iron-core transformer power supply it would have to be the size of a small car and quite possibly the weight of a planet.

Chord's innovations don't stop at the power supply either. The output stages of all the brand's amplifiers are designed around custom Metal On Silicon Field Effect Transistors (MOSFETs), developed exclusively for Chord by a UK semiconductor company that similarly emerged from the aerospace industry.

Power Chord

The result of all this technical aero-wizardry is a mightily potent amp that runs in Class A mode during normal use without the associated heat problems of traditional Class A designs. And, when the going gets tough, the sliding bias slips the amplifier into Class A/B mode to deliver a claimed 5 x 135W into an 8 Ohm load. Which ought to be enough for everyone.

Minimalist: The SPM 2400's front panel offers nothing more than a power button and LED indicators

The amp's PCBs are suitably heavy-duty double-sided affairs, with each circuit precisely repeated five times to ensure perfect uniformity across channels. The rear and centre circuits are mounted in the upper section of the amplifier to give the key centre-channel plenty of cooling space. The front channels are on the underside of the board, separated by two aluminium plates for screening and improved heat dissipation. All that clever Class A engineering and heat sinking works well, too. During a marathon five-hour movie and music fest the SPM 2400 got toasty but remained a whole lot cooler than even two-channel Class A to A/B amps that have been on the test bench.

> 'Next to other hardware, the SPM 2400 looks like a piece of fine artwork in a sea of metal boxes'

Built to last

As a dedicated amplifier rather than an AV receiver, there are few bells or whistles to be found on the SPM 2400. The rear panel is a huge slab of aluminium that looks like it could halt a charging elephant. I didn't have the space, or indeed an elephant, to test this theory, but at 8mm thick the backside is about as chunky as they get. Unless, of course, you compare it with the SPM 2400's own front panel. This is 15mm thick and could probably stop an elephant launched from a cannon. And, no, I didn't have a cannon either.

For hooking up to a pre-amp, you have the choice between fully-balanced XLR or unbalanced phono inputs. For your speakers, you get a mighty set of WBT binding posts for each channel. There is a single 12V trigger input and, unusually, pin switches to swap the phase of each channel. If you have got your wiring correct I can't really think of a use for those.

Peering through the SPM 2400's top vent holes you can see an array of LEDs that illuminate the bank on the front panel. There's nothing else on the front panel other than a single power button of the finest black plastic. Given the SPM 2400's otherwise supreme lushness in the cosmetic department, I find the power button stands out like a pork chop at a Bar Mitzvah. It's a bit wobbly, too, which dents the whole

Storemaps

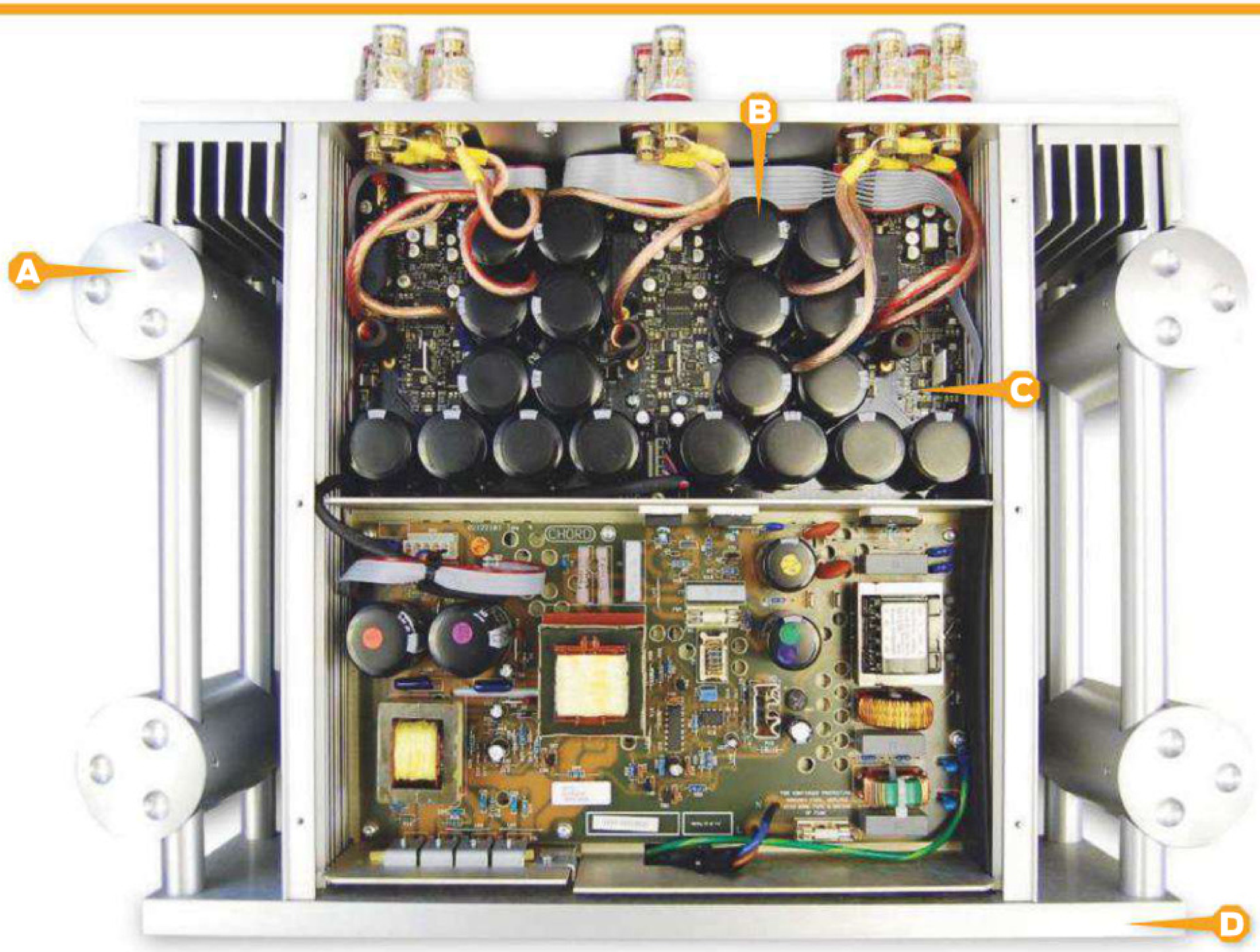
prestige-feel somewhat. Of the seven LEDs, one green one indicates the power is on, while five blue ones indicate each channel is ready to rock and roll. There is a seventh that I presume is a protection indicator should you short the terminals. I say 'presume' because the instruction manual I was supplied with covered every Chord power amp in existence – except the SPM 2400.

Fast and furious

Big, heavy and expensive power amps often have a big and sometimes heavy sound; robust and forceful yet often just a little sluggish off the mark. Not so the SPM 2400. It certainly sounds monstrous, but it is also faster than a turbo-charged greyhound. Across the frequency range this amp is every bit a thoroughbred audiophile performer with a deliciously natural balance, and raw speed and dynamics that take your breath away. Everything from soundtracks to largescale special effects have a transient attack that catches most other gargantuan multichannel amps still in the foyer buying a tub of Ben and Jerry's. The sound is clean, crisp and unerringly dynamic, with a soundstage you can measure in acres. The neutral balance across the board is absolutely constant irrespective of volume, which just begs you to go large and loud with every movie or CD you feed it.

The Chord's precision and attack is finely demonstrated with the immaculate *Legends of Jazz* Blu-ray and its Dolby TrueHD soundtrack. Marcus Miller's slap bass guitar at the beginning of *The Panther* is tangibly real in the room and, when the bass kicks in, the overall effect is pure audiophile heaven, with a big side-order of foot-tapping, head-bobbing engagement. Skip to the classic Jane Monheit track and the SPM 2400 manages something I have only heard from a handful of other power amplifier systems in my room, and they all cost multiples of the Chord's price tag. Her voice is mic'd to the left of centre and transposed marginally further forward than John Pizzarelli's. The SPM 2400 absolutely nails her vocal positioning and generates space for the orchestra to fill the room around her.

The effect is equally sublime with movies. The speed of the presentation and the three-dimensional imaging really plants you in the midst of the action and immerses you in the plot. A product with this level of performance demanded I play arguably the best opening sequence of any >



Getting its top off: the inside story on the Chord SPM 2400

A Column inches
Chord's signature aluminium column-supports are consistent throughout its high-end range

B Mass capacitance
Some 136,000 uF of capacitance for the main power rail ensures plenty of current on demand

C Double layer
The SPM 2400 uses a double-layer PCB with heavy copper tracks and five identical amplifier circuits for uniformity

D Heavy duty
Build quality is high. The Chord's front panel is made from a 15mm slab of aluminium. The rear panel is 8mm thick

HIGH END HERO



science-fiction film, that of the eleventh instalment of the *Star Trek* franchise. Here, as George Kirk manhandles the *USS Kelvin* into its crash course, the ship exploding around him and his wife giving birth on an escape shuttle, the sound fills the room in a huge emotional swell of effects and dialogue. The explosions are crisp and weighty, the crackling and collapsing spacecraft is layered in every corner of the room, and the frantic speech cuts through with power and passion. During the last minute before the *Kelvin* hits the Romulan mining ship, the SPM 2400 drives the scene with edge-of-the-seat tension and breathtaking emotion. It's enough to move you to tears. It did me.

> 'The sound is clean, crisp and unerringly dynamic, with a soundstage you can measure in acres'

In the next scene, the young James Kirk thrashes a 1965 Chevrolet Corvette across the Iowa desert with reckless abandon. The SPM 2400 breathes life into the old V8 engine – it rumbles into the room with a deep, guttural and eminently believable growl. And that is very much part of the Chord's charm. It seems to ignore all the logic of filmmaking and sound reproduction and brings a sense of reality to a scene like few other amplifiers at any price. There's no ultra-fat or ridiculously gung-ho bass, no splashing top-end excess and no overt booming on male voices. Rarely have I heard an amp so beautifully balanced throughout the range, with exceptional space and clarity about the dialogue, male or female.

Two-pronged attack: The amp offers both balanced XLR and unbalanced phono inputs

Clean-sounding

Connected to my Denon AVP-A1HD processor, running without EQ resulted in the cleanest and most dynamic presentation. Going through the Denon's somewhat arduous multipoint Audyssey EQ setup, the result was gentle filtering to address some light room-borne issues but otherwise a very clean result. However, the layering of the Audyssey filtering didn't do anything to improve the Chord's natural presence and clarity and, if anything,

StereoMags



→ Specifications

Power output: 5 x 135W (8 Ohm)
Connections: 5 x XLR inputs; 5 x phono inputs; 5 x WBT binding post speaker outputs
Dimensions: 420(w) x 135(h) x 320(d)mm
Weight: 20kg
Features: Chord custom power supply; bespoke MOSFET output stages; phase invert switch for each channel; protection circuitry; 12V trigger; LED status indicators; aluminium construction

robbed it of some richness through the mid-bass. Switching the Audyssey on and off, I plumped for 'off' every time. This is one very clean-sounding power amp.

Punch up the volume and the fun really begins. The *Enterprise* emerges from Saturn's dust ring like some creature creeping from the primordial slime. Given a handful of volume, the orchestral backing music fills the room as if the brass section is standing behind the sofa. Pushed hard, the Chord's claimed 135W-per-channel lives up to its billing, with no discernible compression as the decibel meter registers the naughty side of 100dB. Pushed even harder still and the SPM 2400 still holds it together, leaving you with only a mild hankering for some more grunt at seriously neighbour-unfriendly levels.

By now you've probably gathered that I rate the SPM 2400 very, very highly indeed. Wobbly power button aside, the only thing that I don't like about is that it's five-channel only, when most serious home cinema fans are likely to be running a seven-channel system. You could, of course, add one of Chord's stereo amplifiers, but a single seven-channel solution would be my dream purchase.

Best of British

The above is, of course, just a minor moan. Amplifiers don't get you much more involved with the action than this at any price. Made in Britain, Chord's SPM 2400 is an audibly and visually stunning beast that leaves most of the US-born high-end competition sounding sluggish and bloated. Oh, rule Britannia!

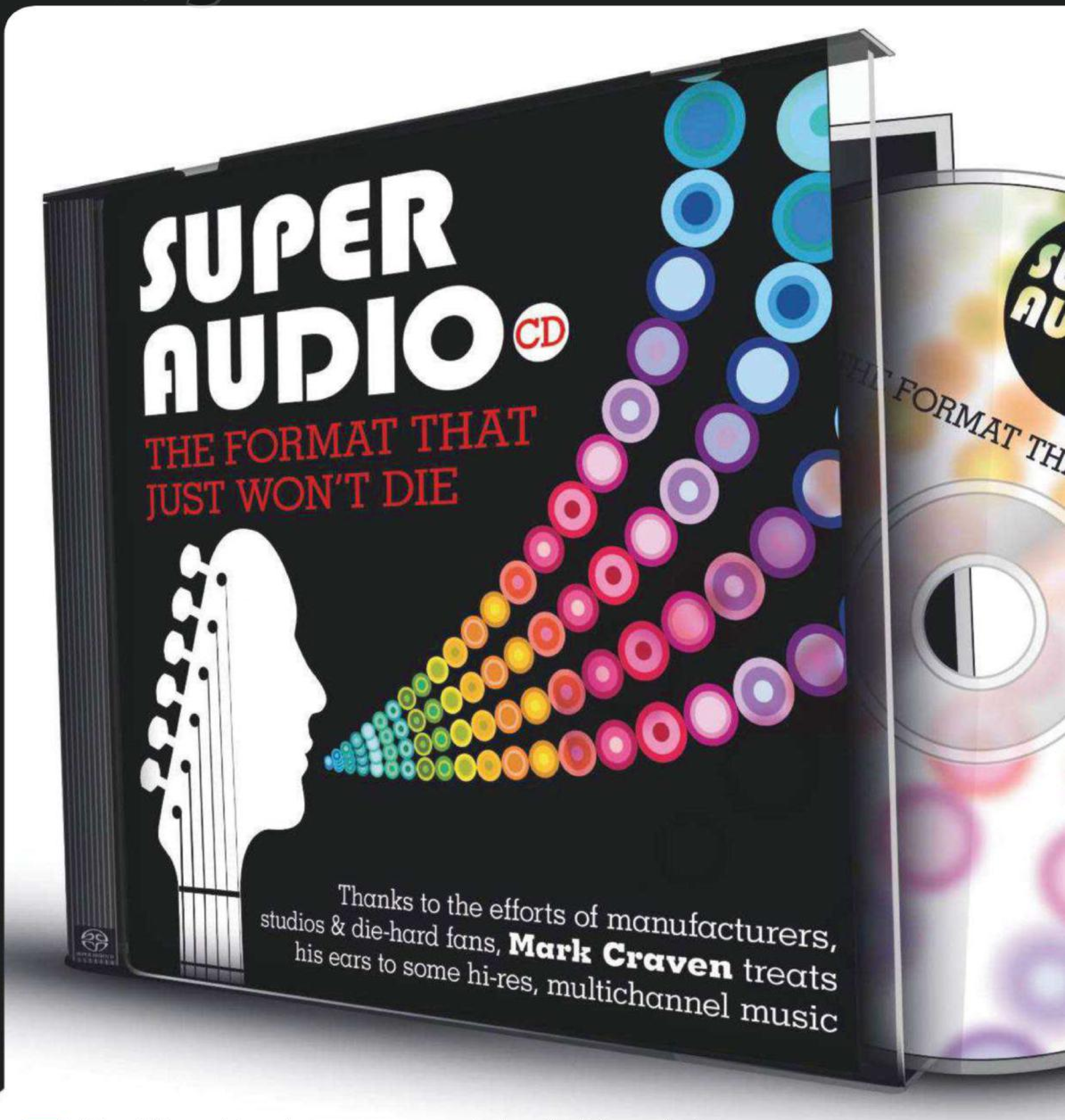


HCC VERDICT

Chord Electronics SPM 2400
→ £7,000 approx → Supplier: www.chordelectronics.co.uk
→ Tel: 01622 721 444

Highs: Ultrafast and immersive sound; great balance; visually stunning; solid build
Lows: The plastic power button... er, that's it

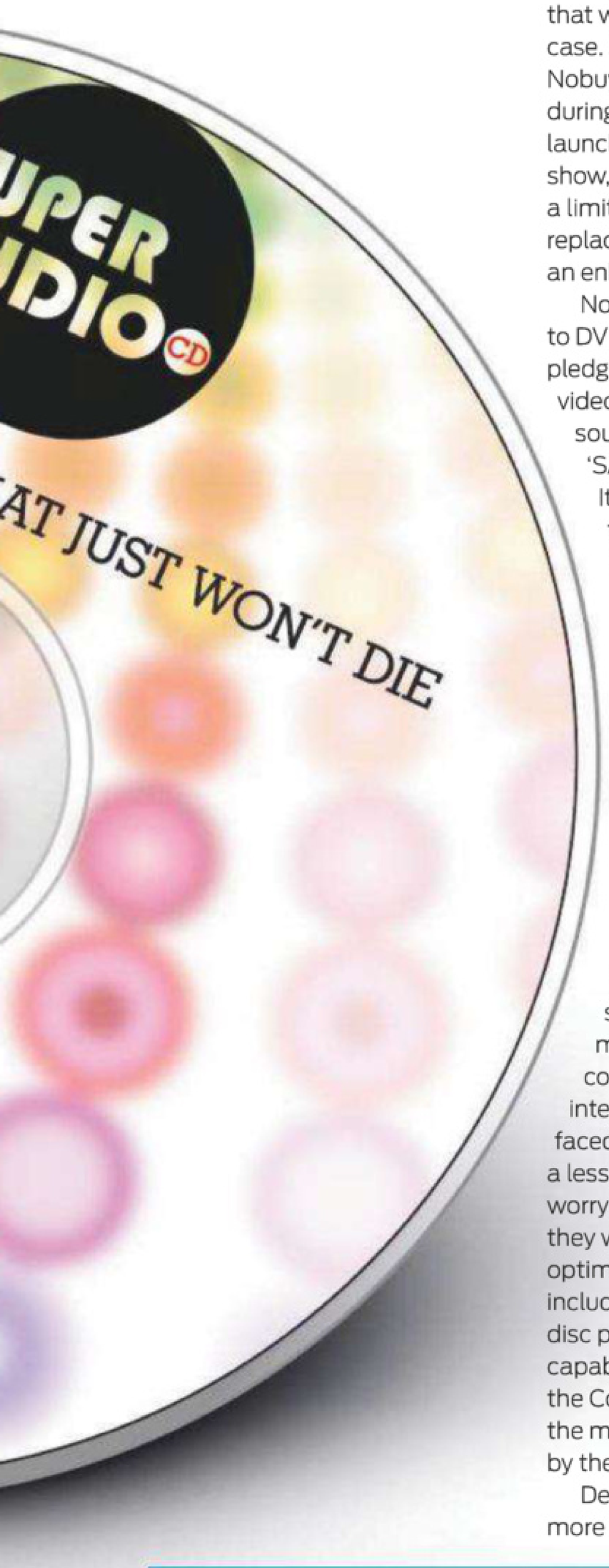
Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 4 **5**



The history of AV can easily be read as a history of formats. Some, like VHS, gradually wither and die, surpassed by better alternatives. Others, like HD DVD, come and go in a flash, crushed by smarter, better-marketed rivals. And then there are those that carry on despite people claiming they're as good as dead. One of these is DVD (207 million disc sales in the UK in 2011). And the other is Super Audio CD.

That this audio-only disc-based format hasn't disappeared altogether is something of a head-scratcher. It's been under attack from all sides – MP3s and CDs at one end, hi-res downloads at the other, and DVD-Audio taking pot-shots from the side. But support from both hardware manufacturers and software labels means it's in fine fettle, with the number of titles being released enjoying an upswing in recent years. Good news for fans of high-quality music – especially if you like listening in 5.1.

Super Audio CD launched in 1999, the result of a joint-technology venture from Sony and Philips,



two companies which had enjoyed massive success in the 1980s with the CD format. Yet while it's now common to say that SACD was touted as a replacement for CD, that was never quite the case. Sony president Nobuyuki Idei, speaking during the European launch at the 1999 IFA technology show, was clear: 'SACD is definitely a limited market. It's not a replacement for CD – more an enhancement.'

Nor was it, apparently, a rival to DVD-Audio, the newcomer that pledged to mix hi-res audio and video together. 'I don't like to mix sound and picture,' said Idei. 'SACD is exclusively for sound. It will provide a motivation to improve other components in the chain, truly a three-dimensional experience compared to CD sound. The format will revitalise old titles. It's like a fine wine compared to a new Beaujolais – and quality not quantity.'

Philips' then marketing guru Paul Reynolds concurred: 'Our view is that we don't want to replace CD – but offer a migration path to something better. We hold a different view from others on the DVD Forum who want to replace the CD.'

Yet even with these limited goals in mind, it's unlikely that the tech giants behind it now view SACD as a major success. The arrival of MP3 players took music-listening for most consumers in a completely different direction, and even those interested in a higher-quality experience were faced with purchasing new expensive hardware, a less-than-extensive library of titles and the worry that, with DVD-Audio in the marketplace, they were backing the wrong horse. The optimistic behaviour of the early 2000s, which included Philips announcing an SACD hybrid disc production line in California in 2002 with a capability of 3 million platters a year, followed by the Consumer Electronics Association predicting the majority of consumers enjoying hi-res audio by the year 2015, now seems unbelievable.

Denon's consultant Roger Batchelor offers a more balanced, contemporary view. 'One never really knows until a few years down the line with any new format. It seemed to be taking off with the release of the Rolling Stones back catalogue and so on, but in the end it was destined to become a niche format.'



On the jukebox: SACD releases range from '70s rock to classic jazz

Of course, being a niche format doesn't mean it's not worth getting excited about, and SACD has the technology chops to make AV-freaks salivate. Instead of Pulse Code Modulation (PCM), as used on CDs, SACD represents the music in a form known as Direct Stream Digital (DSD). DSD differs

> 'The arrival of MP3 players took music-listening for most consumers in a totally different direction'

from 16-bit or 24-bit PCM by operating at a far higher sampling rate (2.8MHz rather than CD's 44.1kHz) and as a stream of single bits. This 1-bit strategy avoids the digital filters used in PCM systems, and delivers a comparable dynamic range to 24-bit PCM with a frequency response that extends well beyond CD.

Universally speaking

If you've never heard SACD, the good news is that there's a chance you're already kitted out to do so. Universal Blu-ray players, such as those from Cambridge Audio, Oppo, Denon, Marantz and Pioneer all support the format, and then there are decks from Sony. The Japanese company has continued to release hardware compatible with its own format, including its Blu-ray players. So while SACD playback was dropped from the PlayStation 3 console in 2007, it still lurks in BD decks as affordable as the £130 BDP-S390.

How you output the hi-res audio, either decoded to PCM or as a DSD stream, depends on your player and AV receiver.

So what does the SACD experience offer you, the multichannel movie soundtrack fan? Well, >

All hands on deck

SACD at the entry-level

By our reckoning, Sony's BDP-S390 Blu-ray player offers the most affordable gateway into SACD playback yet. Available for £130, this slimline, 'net-connected disc-spinner allows the format's DSD streams to be output over HDMI, or decoded internally to PCM, for playback via your AVR. Chuck in Wi-Fi media streaming and access to the Sony Entertainment Network, BD/DVD/CD playback and smartphone control and you've got a home cinema bargain.





firstly, it's very much a passive experience. Listening to The Who's *Tommy* in 5.1 requires you to actually sit and listen – get up and start doing the housework and you'll miss out on the surround effect. But it's definitely worth the effort. SACD's improved sonics over vanilla CD are a treat for audiophiles, with a cleaner, crisper presentation. Meanwhile, hearing your favourite albums remixed in 5.1 can leave you grinning from ear to ear. The aforementioned *Tommy* remix, overseen by The Who's guitarist Pete Townshend, makes extraordinary use of the full soundfield, layering the vocals across multiple speakers while placing specific instruments in separate channels.

And at the end of the day, it's all about the software. The SACD library now runs to more than 6,000 titles, and there should be discs in there that take your fancy, from classical music to '70s rock and '80s electronica. Multichannel releases from Dire Straits, David Bowie and Pink Floyd are all present and correct. No sign of Lady Gaga in 5.1 yet, though – or The Beatles. And if you want the best possible two-channel performance, Sony's Technical Marketing Manager Eric Kingdon insists you check out a new release on SHM-SACD from Universal, called *Espana*. 'The material construction of these [Super High Material] discs, along with the green dye, single-layer structure, plus DSD mastering from the original analogue tapes, makes for an unforgettable experience.'

Looking to the future

Will we still be here in another 13 years extolling the virtues of SACD? That's impossible to predict. The growth of lossless downloads (in 5.1 format, too), would suggest that the audiophile community might be ready to ditch their disc-players in favour of their desktop PC. But, on the other hand, people are still buying vinyl...

Hardware manufacturers, meanwhile, are in no rush to flee the SACD party. Says Denon's Roger Batchelor: 'Whilst there is an ongoing demand for the format, Denon and Marantz will continue to support SACD. And the demand is worldwide, especially in Japan.'

Sony's Eric Kingdon agrees: 'As a company we are committed to higher-fidelity, both in a pure audio sense and in an audio-visual sense as well. Current IC [integrated circuit] systems offer good solutions to incorporate format compatibility at the design stage.'

What is also certain is that the longevity of SACD bodes well for the most important home cinema format of all – Blu-ray. While some people have been writing off HD movie platters since almost the moment Blu-ray launched, the format is very much alive and kicking. And if it does come to a point where it's being sustained by a hardcore AV community and benevolent kit manufacturers, then so be it. That actually sounds like fun



Well-regarded: Oppo's BDP-95EU multichannel universal deck (top) and Sony's SCD-1 stereo-only reference-level player



Still going: Denon's new DBT-1713UD player continues the brand's support for SACD

SACD's great rival – DVD-Audio

Because when there's one new format, there's often another

Launched almost simultaneously in Europe as SACD, the DVD-Audio format was the brainchild of a tech alliance that included Panasonic, Toshiba, JVC and Pioneer. Considered a serious rival to SACD, DVD-Audio offered a similar high-spec, with 96kHz/24-bit 5.1 music supported.

One main point of difference with SACD is that DVD-Audio featured no level of backwards-compatibility – the DVD discs came without a CD-player-friendly layer. Like SACD, new hardware was required to enable playback of hi-res audio tracks. At launch, these included Technics' DVD-A10 and Panasonic's DVD-A7.

Software releases for DVD-Audio span similar genres to SACD, with the 5.1-channel Beatles 're-imagining' *Love* being a particular highlight.



2012 continues to see DVD-Audio discs being released, albeit as a trickle rather than a torrent – *King Crimson: Live in Argentina 1994* is the latest release. And DVD-Audio authoring software is enabling sonic geeks to burn their own discs. Yet with more SACD players on the shelves at bargain prices – thanks to Sony – and a healthier catalogue of releases coming to market, it's safe to say that SACD has triumphed in this particular format war.

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Contact hdworld@jvc.co.uk for a special preview.

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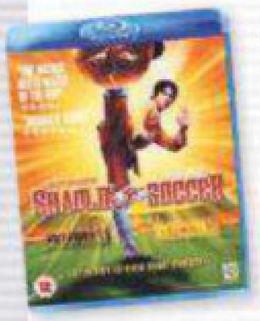
The 10 sports movies that need more love!



Tired of watching British athletes stumble to a fifth-placed finish? Then check out these underrated sporting classics where everyone's a winner...

With a very large sporting event taking place right now in the East End of London – which we're too scared to name for fearing of being sued into oblivion – *Team HCC* set about compiling its list of the greatest ever sports movies. And once we'd done that, we tore it up and threw it in the bin, after realising that you don't need us to tell you that *Raging Bull* is the best boxing flick of all time, that *Slap Shot* is *the* original sports comedy, or that *Chariots of Fire* (reviewed on p105) is an extraordinary piece of filmmaking.

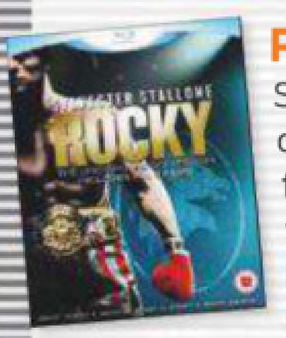
So instead, we've collected together the ten sports movies that we believe are equally worthy of high praise, yet often get overlooked. The sporting also-rans, if you like, covering everything from football to boxing to golf to boxing again (Hollywood has a thing about boxing...). Alongside the champion flicks, these runners-up still demand a place in your disc collection.



Shaolin Soccer

For one reason or another, the film industry has struggled to make a successful movie about the planet's most popular sport, despite everyone from Sean Bean (*When Saturday Comes*) to Danny Cannon (*Goal!*) taking a shot. They've even looked at blending it with other concepts, such as football in prison (the *Mean Machine* remake), football in a prisoner of war camp (*Escape to Victory*) and, er, football with animals (*Soccer Dog*). And none of those will have you screaming 'back of the net!' either. Thankfully, Stephen Chow's 2001 flick *Shaolin Soccer* bucks the trend. A gloriously demented slapstick comedy that mixes the beautiful game with physics-defying martial arts, it's easily the best footy film ever crafted, with gags reminiscent of *Police Squad!* and outlandish special effects. Chow followed it up three years later with the equally brilliant *Kung Fu Hustle*.

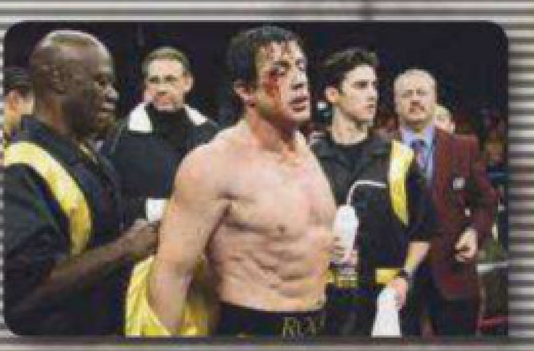
Get the disc: Optimum Home Entertainment brought *Shaolin Soccer* to Blu-ray in 2009, with both the shortened English dub and uncut Cantonese language versions getting DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio. Snap it up for as little as £5!

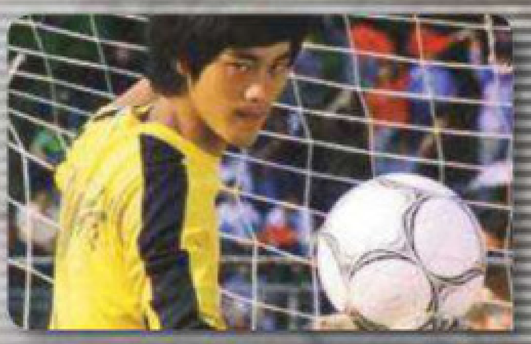


Rocky Balboa

Sylvester Stallone may have collected an Academy Award for *Rocky*, and pretty much won the Cold War single-handedly in *Rocky IV*, but *Rocky Balboa* represents his real triumph – here, Sly bounces back in sublime fashion from the underwhelming *Rocky V*.

While it takes a world-weary concept (the former champ coming out of retirement for one final fight), *Rocky Balboa* does it with aplomb. Stallone is clever enough to realise that even the most committed of fans won't believe the >

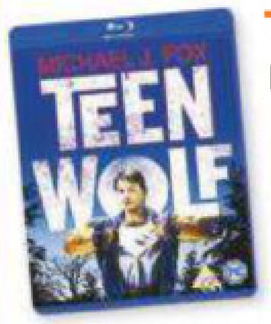






Shaolin Soccer (left) and *Rocky Balboa* – both films involve violence...

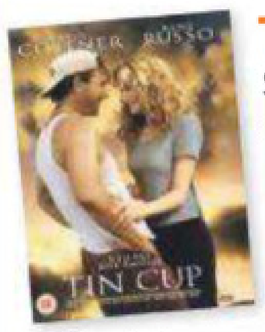
60-year-old as a lightning-fast pugilist, and adapts the movie-ending matchup accordingly, while the ring sequences are the most brutal the franchise has delivered. Not the greatest boxing movie ever made, but one of the heavyweights.
Get the disc: Why get *Rocky Balboa* on its own when Twentieth Century Fox's *...Undisputed Collection* rounds up all six movies in a Blu-ray box set with a bonus platter packed with extras?



Teen Wolf

In this 1985 high-school comedy, Michael J. Fox's adolescent teen learns valuable life lessons thanks to an unfortunate episode of lycanthropy, the most important being that it's never acceptable to cheat at sports – especially when that involves becoming a werewolf.

Released only a month after *Back to the Future*, *Teen Wolf* wasn't a massive hit at the box office and split critics, but *Team HCC* is firmly in the 'pro' camp. This is joyous, playful filmmaking, packed with standout scenes (such as the bathroom 'wolf out') and a foot-tapping music montage. It even made us want to pretend to surf on the roof our car while listening to The Beach Boys, until we realised it was inherently dangerous. Don't bother with the sequel, though – it lacks bite.
Get the disc: The recent BD platter from Fox isn't the last word in HD sharpness and almost devoid of extras, but it only costs about £10.



Tin Cup

Sandwiched between *Waterworld* and *The Postman* in Kevin Costner's hit-and-miss acting oeuvre, *Tin Cup* often gets overlooked amongst all the pointing and laughing about box office failures and bad haircuts. But this is Costner in top form, playing a likeable, loutish golfer who makes a remarkable charge at winning the US Open, spurred on by the chance to steal his rival's girlfriend. Cheech Marin provides able comic support as his best friend and caddy, and cameos from golfing pros such as Phil Mickelson add a vague air of realism. And the finale, where things don't quite go as expected, leaves you with a warm fuzzy feeling inside. A challenger on the tee to *Caddyshack* and *Happy Gilmore*.
Get the disc: That *Tin Cup* isn't yet available on Blu-ray is almost as shocking as Tiger Woods' attempts to win a major title over the last four years. Make do with the DVD instead.



Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby

For a brief period during the last decade, Will Ferrell seemed determined to make as many sports movies as possible, including *Kicking and Screaming* (football), *Blades of Glory* (ice skating) and *Semi-Pro* (basketball). Yet none of these come close to matching *Talladega Nights...*, his skewed look at the world of NASCAR racing. Aided by hilarious performances from John C. Reilly as his petrolhead pal and Sacha Baron Cohen as a French ex-F1 driver, Ferrell serves up a comic car crash that withstands repeat viewing, and pokes fun at the commercialisation of professional motor racing. We'd happily watch a sequel, but Ferrell has instead chosen to revisit his other great American idiot, Ron Burgundy, for a cinema release next year.
Get the disc: Sony Pictures' region-free BD release is one of the format's earliest titles, and offers LPCM 5.1 and MPEG-2 encoded visuals. That's 2006 for you.



In briefs: Will Ferrell's *Talladega Nights...* is well worth a pit stop

Sporting failures

Relegate these discs from your collection!



Space Jam
Michael Jordan cannot act. Bugs Bunny cannot slam-dunk. And that's pretty much all you need to know

Soccer Dog 2: European Cup
So bad that even actor Nick Moran tries to pretend he's not Nick Moran at all in the DVD's *Making of...* doc

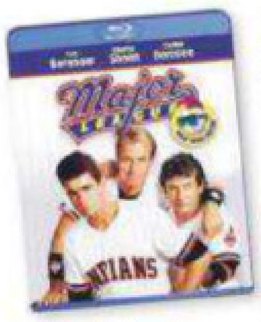
The Ringer
Johnny Knoxville goes a step too far in this comedy about a man pretending to be disabled so he can compete in the Paralympics

Rollerball [2002]
The original almost made our top 10 – this bland remake doesn't get anywhere close

Nacho Libre
Occasional funnyman Jack Black dives into the world of Lucha libre wrestling with predictably yawnsome results

The Legend of Bagger Vance
Is Bagger Vance a ghost? Is he an angel? Quite frankly, we gave up caring about halfway through. Sorry Will.

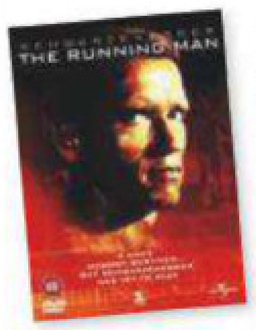
MVP: Most Valuable Primate
We haven't actually watched this flick about an ice-hockey-playing chimpanzee, but we're certain it's awful



Major League

It's hard to imagine now, but in the 1980s Charlie Sheen had Hollywood at his feet. Following lead turns in *Platoon* and *Wall Street*, he could have any role he wanted. That he chose to make this fabulous, foul-mouthed baseball comedy is our gain. That he followed it with *Hot Shots!*, *Major League II*, several hundred episodes of lightweight US TV comedy and a public breakdown is best ignored.

Major League is the perfect antidote to romanticised baseball flicks like *Field of Dreams* and *The Natural*. Highlights include *24*'s Dennis Haysbert as a voodoo-practising Cuban import, a young Wesley Snipes as the fast-but-useless Willie Mays Hayes and Sheen's short-sighted ex-con pitcher. Sure, you might need a bit of baseball knowledge to understand exactly what's so special about the climatic play – but you don't need to be American to laugh at someone sacrificing a bucket of KFC...
Get the disc: There's no UK Blu-ray release available yet for *Major League* (let alone the two sequels), but you can import Paramount's US disc, which is region-free.



The Running Man

Part of a sub-genre best described as 'futuristic death sports', *The Running Man* melds a story from Stephen King with the cinematic presence of Arnie and a 1980s action-movie sensibility to craft 100 minutes of popcorn-munching magic.

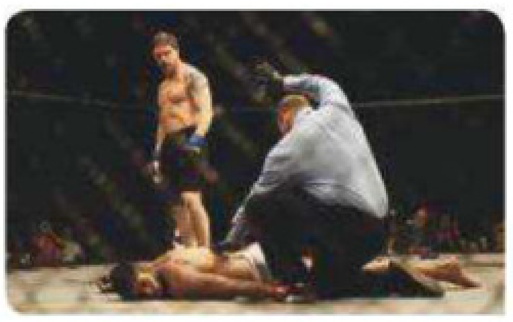
The sport in question is the eponymous gameshow, where prisoners have to evade vicious killers in a bid for freedom. Naturally, Schwarzenegger's felon (who is, of course, innocent) is more than a match for the show's in-house 'stalkers' (Fireball, Dynamo, Buzzsaw *et al*). What follows are some of the most fantastically violent and gory deaths we can remember, with their edge only slightly dulled by the pun-tastic one-liners. *The Running Man* is the kind of movie that Hollywood just wouldn't make anymore. Shame.
Get the disc: US fans get to enjoy this killer flick with 7.1 DTS-HD Master Audio, but Lionsgate's disc is locked to Region A, so you may have to opt for the DVD – unless you fancy the English-language BD release from German distributor Starlight Film, which is cut by around eight minutes.

Storemags.com



[L-R] *Tin Cup*, *Teen Wolf* and *Major League* – where sport and jokes collide





Discs of fury: *Real Steel* (top) and *Warrior* – two pulverising Blu-ray experiences

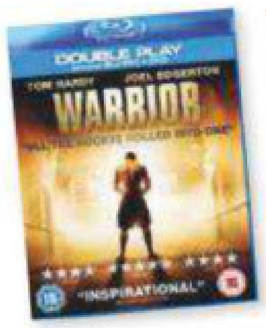


Real Steel

Another boxing flick, but with a major difference – this time the sluggers are robots.

DreamWorks' decision to take a *Twilight Zone* episode and flesh it out into a big-budget family film proved a no-brainer in 2011 once *Real Steel* had pulverised its way to box office figures of close to $300m. Hugh Jackman stars as the washed-up ex-boxer putting all his faith in a knackered old 'bot and building a relationship with his long-lost son in the process. If that sounds too schmaltzy for you, ignore the plot and focus on the fight sequences. The mechanical mayhem is up there with best that the *Transformers* franchise has to offer – but you'll actually care who wins.

Get the disc: Walt Disney's recent BD release delivers astonishing AVC-encoded HD imagery and a relentless DTS-HD MA 7.1 mix. Champion.



Warrior

If your experience of Mixed Martial Arts movies runs as far as the *Bloodsport* franchise from the late 80s/early 90s then *Warrior* will be a welcome surprise. British thesp Tom Hardy repeats the bulking-up trick he employed in *Bronson* to play rookie MMA fighter Tommy, who ends up challenging his estranged brother and former UFC pro Brendan (Joel Edgerton) for a $5,000,000 prize. Nick Nolte increases the machismo count in a supporting role.

Aside from the tight script and brooding performances, *Warrior* scores its points for the visceral nature of the cage-fighting sequences. The complex bouts are effortlessly marshalled by director Gary O'Connor and fight choreographer J.J Perry – this is an experience that will leave you, and your system, battered and bruised.

Get the disc: Available as a Region B Blu-ray from Lionsgate, with both 5.1 and 7.1 sound mixes and plenty of MMA input in the bonus features.

The subs' bench

Are these 'sports movies'? Probably not

Point Break
Kathryn Bigelow's brilliant action/thriller packs in surfing and skydiving

Alien vs Predator
The dreadlocked hunters breed aliens so they can play a nasty game of hide 'n' seek

Moneyball
What's more exciting than baseball? This Brad Pitt vehicle about the business of baseball

The Seventh Seal
Max von Sydow challenges Death to a game of chess in Ingmar Bergam's 1957 classic



Whip It

An alien trawling Hollywood's back catalogue might be left thinking that only men take part in sport. Women, after all, get short shrift from Tinseltown when it comes to sporting endeavours. Step forward 2009's *Whip It* to help redress the gender imbalance – and we're glad it did, too, because otherwise we might be writing about the high school cheerleader comedy *Bring It On*...

Drew Barrymore's directorial debut is a gem of a movie, a coming-of-age 'dromedy' revolving around a directionless teenager (Ellen '*Juno*' Page) finding purpose through roller derby, the bizarre US sport that involves skating around a track bashing each other out of the way. As a metaphor for the trials and tribulations of adolescence it's a good one, and *Whip It* never strays too far into clichéd sports movie territory – this flick has a raw, unconventional edge that doesn't grate.

Get the disc: Lionsgate's 2010 UK Blu-ray release offers more extra features than its US counterpart and DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics



The new school uniform wasn't to everyone's tastes

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For more information phone Mark - **01482 887717**

→ Kit checklist

JVC: X9 Full HD 3D projector
Rotel: RSP-1572 processor; RMB-1575 five-channel power amp; RB-1572 stereo power amp
Artcoustic: 4 x DF65-50 X2; 3 x DF75-50 X2
Velodyne: 2 x CHT-15Q subwoofers
Screen International: 4m-wide 16:9 tab-tensioned, micro-perforated motorized screen
Denon: DBP-2012UD universal Blu-ray player
Sky: Sky+HD box
Sony: PlayStation 3
Nevo: S70 remote
BDI: Mirage 8222 cabinet
OmniMount: Ceiling bracket and extension pole

TITANIC TUSSLE
Check out our BD review of *Wrath of the Titans* on p97

storemags.com



This four-metre screen is perfect for epic blockbusters

Clunk, click every flick

Mark Craven tours a cinema room with an automotive flavour

Some of us have simple ideas when it comes to home cinema design – nothing more fancy than a two-seater sofa and a couple of foot stools. Not so the owner of this dedicated room, which incorporates high-end electronics with a collection of Mini Coopers...

Designed and fitted by Essex installers Rayleigh Hi-Fi, this largescale space used to be a swimming pool, but now functions as a cinema room and working garage, meaning the owner is able to watch Blu-ray movies and Sky HD while working away on his collection of classic cars. He can even sit in one of the Minis to relax in front of the four-metre-wide projector screen, drive-in-theatre style.

Firing at this mammoth display is a high-end JVC X9 projector, with sources including a Sony PlayStation 3 (for driving games, obviously) and a Denon universal disc-spinner. 7.2 audio is delivered via a combination of on-wall Artcoustic speakers and Velodyne subwoofers. Amplification and processing is handled by Rotel separates.

With its purple walls, lime-green furniture and cardboard Stig replica, this pro-install probably isn't one for those with conservative tastes, but at *HCC* we're all in favour of bringing a sense of fun to proceedings – and we'd love to take this setup for a spin. >



Room essentials

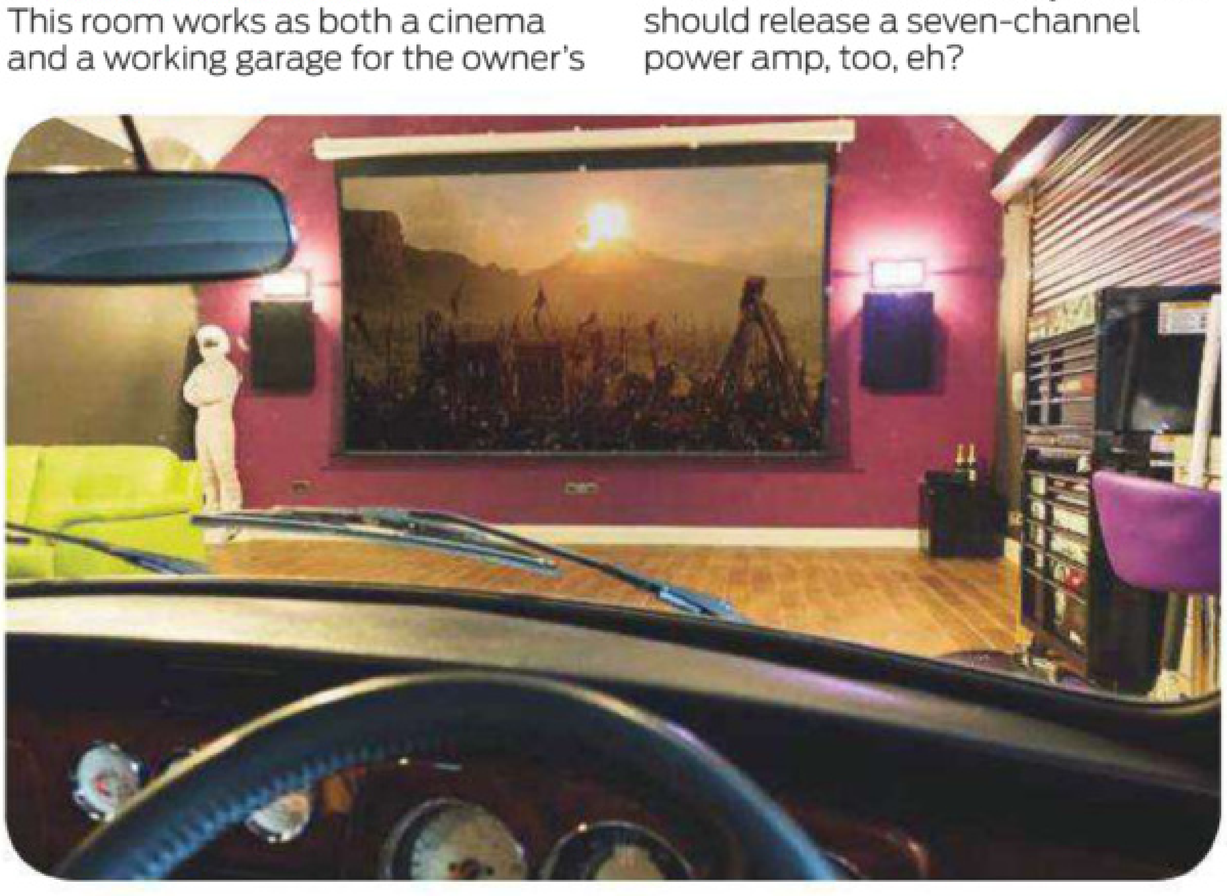
A Hi-def up high
JVC's X9 projector was chosen not only for its high-quality picture – its automatic lens cover ensures engine fumes and dust from the cars won't harm the optics

B Art attack
Covering the surround and rear-back channels is a quartet of Artcoustic DF65-50 X2s, each featuring a pair of 5.5in 'midwoofers' and a pair of 1.5in tweeters. Various screen cloth options are available, but black is the order of the day here

C Mini madness
This room works as both a cinema and a working garage for the owner's collection of Minis – as such, the projector screen is retractable to avoid damage, and floorstanding speakers were eschewed in favour of wall-mountable cabinets

D Sound supervisor
Rotel's RSP-1572 processor supports Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA and offers 3D passthrough, should the owner feel the urge to watch *TT3D: Closer to the Edge*

E Deadly duo
Fed by the Rotel processor are two power amps, one five-channel and one two-channel. Maybe Rotel should release a seven-channel power amp, too, eh?





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DIGITAL COPY

Mark Craven is so used to his remote control that flipping channels is now second nature – but he's worried that may all be about to change

I've been thinking a lot about remote controls recently. Not in an up-all-night, howling at the moon kind of way, but pondering them nevertheless. And I've come to realise that the remote control is still a massively important part of the home cinema experience. Not as sexy as quad pixel tech and wireless transmission systems, maybe, but still worth talking about.

The reason for these ruminations is that in the past few weeks I've seen some products with truly excellent handsets and operating systems, and others where the user experience is far from streamlined. And with the latter, it means that no matter how good a TV, Blu-ray player, receiver or whatever, you're left with a feeling that it could have been better, if only the engineers had spent as much time using the product as they had fiddling with the processing algorithms.

The times are a-changin'

These days, TV manufacturers change their interfaces and handsets as often as I change my socks. Possibly even more often than that. Take Philips, for example, which is planning to move from a largescale, full-screen icon-laden menu to something much more kinetic and svelte, and swapping its handset for a double-sided version with full QWERTY keyboard. All of this means that what was deemed easy-to-use, inviting and intuitive just two years ago is seemingly now no good. Of course, our tastes may have changed – using the fluid menus on our touchscreen phones leads us to want them replicated elsewhere – and new features necessitate new control options, but changing the way that we operate products, away from a system that always worked in the first place, is fraught with peril.

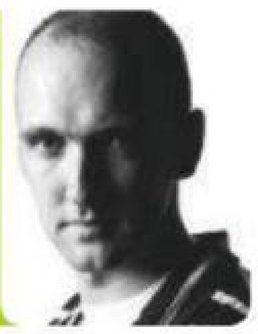
For example, the availability of touchpad control (as well as voice activation and motion-sensing) is causing headaches throughout the R&D labs of the CE world. Panasonic has got so excited by touchpad technology that it's partnered its DMP-BDT320 Blu-ray player with an almost button-less touch-sensitive remote and forgotten to include a regular zapper at the same time. Sure, users will learn to get the hang of it, but do they want to? Some most definitely won't. We love new technology, but we're stick in the muds, too.

Remote controls have been around for donkey's years and we're comfortable with them. Stand up comedians have whole routines based around TV handsets. They've progressed from wired to wireless, from photoelectric to infra-red, but the basic idea remains the same. You get a load of clearly labelled buttons and you push whichever one you require. **Like driving a car or riding a bike, using a handset has become second nature**. I could probably steer my car with something more technically advanced than a big, plastic-coated wheel, but I wouldn't like it.

The good news is that manufacturers do listen to customer feedback and make changes. The aforementioned Philips handset will apparently feature a source/input button – something that was bizarrely overlooked previously. Samsung introduced an awkward touchpanel controller with its then flagship C9000 LED TV in 2010 which was quickly dropped from the following D8000 sets. Maybe Panasonic will bundle an 'old-school' remote alongside its 21st century gizmo this time next year.

Technology moves at such a rate that it can occasionally be hard to keep up. I just hope that the traditional remote doesn't get left behind...

Are you happy with a traditional remote? Or do you want something smarter? Email letters@homecinemachoice.com



Mark Craven contemplated getting his AVR remote grafted onto his right hand, but realised he'd need somewhere to fit the batteries

BACKGROUND IMAGE: © ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/MARK WRAGG



FILM FANATIC

Against all the odds, **The Beek** has become a fan of stereoscopic home cinema, even those movies that have been ret-conned in 3D

Back in February I finally took the plunge and became the proud owner of a 3DTV. Well, I say that. What I actually mean is that I became the proud owner of a shiny new 50in plasma TV that I knew would make my Blu-ray collection look sensational. The fact that it also offered 3D functionality was little more than an afterthought – although I was aware this would enable me to review 3D Blu-ray titles for the Playback section of the magazine, rather than having to palm them off on other, 3D-enabled, members of the team, or making use of whatever stereoscopic TV was kicking around the office [*not literally - Ed*] waiting to be auditioned.

Well, what a difference a few months make. Actually, it's more like a few days. The very moment that the TV arrived I decided to run my *Resident Evil: Afterlife* Blu-ray through it, just to make sure it was all working. Some 96 minutes later, with the film's end credits poking me in the eyes, and memories of Milla Jovovich running around in slow-motion firing bullets into my face still cluttering my brain, I knew that it was.

Within a matter of hours I'd ordered up a 3D Blu-ray copy of Martin Scorsese's *Hugo* on import from the US. And by the end of the week I'd embarked on an indiscriminate campaign of pillaging any 3D discs I could get my hands on from the piles of old, unwanted review copies lying around the *HCC* office. **Before long I had amassed a sizeable collection that took in everything from *Conan the Barbarian* to *The Lovers' Guide 3D*.** In other words, I was hooked on 3D Blu-ray.

All of which is a bit of a change from the bygone days when I once spent month after month slamming the whole idea of 3D in this very column. While I still stand by everything I ever said about *Avatar* back in the day, my stance on 3D as a format has completely shifted. Not that I'm saying it's perfect – but donning those spex in the comfort of my front room has, in some way, managed to transform the simple act of watching a movie at home into a real event once again.

Converting to conversion

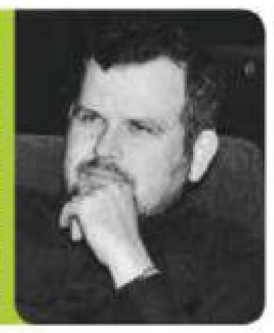
Now, in the months that I've owned the 3DTV, I've had the chance to watch a heck of a lot of stereoscopic films, some native and some converted in post-production. And I've come to the conclusion that people who complain about the latter out of principle are utterly misguided.

I've watched films that were shot native that have badly misjudged stereoscopic effects, and others that were shot 'flat', converted in post, and look absolutely fantastic. It's all about how the filmmakers approach the idea of 3D and plan for it. The much-maligned *Clash of the Titans* remake from 2010 wasn't a poor 3D experience because it was converted. It was a poor 3D experience because the director never intended it to be stereoscopic in the first place, and the conversion was forced onto a film that hadn't been designed with it in mind.

Compare that with *Wrath of the Titans*. It too was shot flat, but this time it was conceived from the beginning as a 3D conversion. And what about *Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance* or *John Carter*, two more conversion jobs that offer some seriously convincing 3D thrills?

My advice is to leave your prejudices behind. Good 3D is good 3D whether it's shot native or achieved in post-production. After all, *Piranha 3D* was a conversion and *Piranha 3DD* was shot native – so you tell me which of the two is the more satisfying experience...

What do you think about converting films into 3D? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com



Anton van Beek is trying to find a way of converting himself into 2D – as opposed to adopting a healthy diet and taking lots of regular exercise

filmfanatic



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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Want to comment on current technology? Need to share? **HCC** is here to help

Thinscreen sound

Generally, I agree that sound quality on TVs is hardly brilliant (*Point of View*, *HCC* 210), though Richard Stevenson's words – 'appalling sonics' – seem a bit strong! I have a Panasonic 37in LED, and it so happened that reviews commented on the 'good' audio of this particular set. Since most TV material is dialogue, the sound is fine – extremely clear, natural, and with more than enough power. One hardly needs ground-shaking bass for most broadcasts. But for some movies, or any music broadcast such as the Proms, I do use the setup of my two ex-BBC monitor speakers and top-quality amplifier, which hugely enriches bass and other frequencies.



LG's 55in OLED TV fits its speakers into a slim, desktop stand

Given the slim designs now, especially with ever slimmer LED TVs and presumably even slimmer OLED TVs, I cannot see how manufacturers can much improve on the drivers and sound circuits. Clearly the large majority of people buying flatscreens are not too worried about this. Or alternatively, check with the brand, since some are better than others – Panasonic for one, in my experience. One friend has a Samsung (only 26in) on which the sound truly is dreadful, weak and dull. I have told him his only solution is either to get a larger

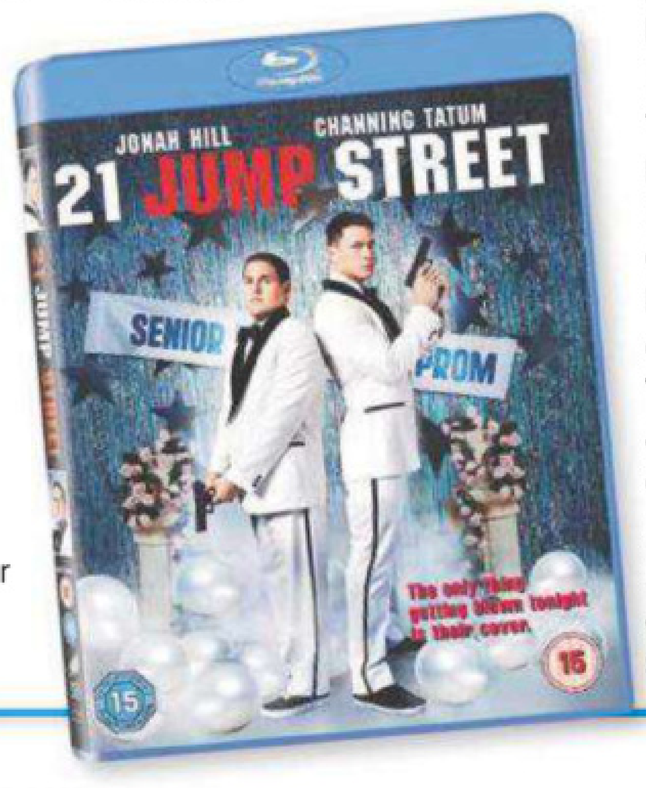
Star Letter

Can I mix my amp and processor?

Seeing your Rewind item last month, it was the review of the Denon AVC-A1SR in the July '02 issue that persuaded me to save up and buy one. It is now fed by a Sony BDP-S760 via multichannel phonos. The main speakers are KEF Reference 1, 200C centre and Q8s for surround and rear. The amp sounds as good today as when I first heard it 10 years ago but the features and connections are now showing their age.

In view of this I have been thinking about adding an Onkyo PR-SC5509 processor and using the Denon, in pure direct mode, as the power amp. Space for them both is not a problem. I have looked back in all of my previous issues and reviews of processors of this type have only ever been matched with dedicated power amps (maybe for good reason!) so I was wondering if this would work – or should I just bite the bullet, get a new amp and ditch the Denon? Any comments much appreciated.

David Amos, via email



Richard Stevenson replies: The old Denon AVC-A1SR was a beast of an amplifier and it benefitted from excellent power supply and very high-spec output transistors. It will be sounding as good today as it always did, so partnering it with the Onkyo PR-SC5509 processor is an excellent way of adding new high-tech features while still enjoying the Denon's sound. The Onkyo is a very 'clean' and so the Denon's beefy character will shine through. Make sure the Denon's individual channel settings are at 0dB and that the speaker distances are all identical to avoid accidentally doubling up your channel delays or level adjustments. Put the Denon in its Pure Direct mode to switch of all the redundant video processing and don't forget you will have two volume knobs to contend with. This is a great upgrade path as it gives you the best features, a sound that you know and love and plenty of potential to upgrade to even better power amps in the future.

Winner: Star Letter-writer David Amos wins a copy of *21 Jump Street* on Blu-ray, courtesy of Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. This comedy remake of the hit TV series is available to buy now on Blu-ray and DVD.

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TV or link up to external speakers. But he hates large TVs even though his room is huge!

I have also found that many people are extremely visually unaware, as well as sonically. Look how many people watch older TV material filmed as 4:3 stretched into 16:9 and do not even notice the fat figures! I even have some friends who assure me they are getting HD since their sets are HD Ready or Full HD – but without HD tuners or cable or satellite! They do not seem to notice the difference.
Roger Payne, via email



Star Wars – the greatest sci-fi movie ever?

Okay, maybe Richard was exaggerating a touch – but then you must remember that he runs a system with about 210 different speakers...

Whether a TV's sound quality is good enough will always depend on the listener. For many, anything with a bit of bass and the ability to go quite loud will be good enough, but as your experience shows, TV speakers don't cut the mustard with certain material. And we don't think the situation will improve with the imminent onslaught of OLED screens, with speakers housed in very slim stands.

As for your friends who don't know they're not watching HD – this is an unfortunate by-product of the launch of 'HD Ready' sets. It's true that some people assume they're getting hi-def just because they have bought an HDTV. It's your job, Roger, to show them what HD actually looks like!

Two sub solution

I was very pleased to read, on page 46 of *HCC* 209, how to connect two subwoofers to a single subwoofer output on an AV receiver. In my bedroom I have a Yamaha RX-V671 receiver, and at present I use a Tannoy TS12 subwoofer. I would like to also connect a Tannoy TS10, the smaller sibling. Having read your instructions on how to do it, I bought a phono splitter from Lindy electronics:

However, when I used this device to connect to the two subwoofers and then cautiously switched one of them on, I got a loud (50Hz?) hum from it. Same thing happened when I switched it off again and then tried the other subwoofer. So, am I using the correct device? If not, please can you tell me which device I should be using. The one I bought was only two quid, so no harm done! So for now I'm using only the larger TS12 subwoofer, the smaller TS10 subwoofer is unused and is feeling unloved.

While I'm here, I must thank Richard Stevenson for his review, in *HCC* 179 (April 2010), of the combined Denon AVR-4810 receiver and BDP-4010UD Blu-ray player. I bought them in August that year and, even if I were to win the lottery, I would not replace them, especially as I don't like 3D and have no interest in streaming. I'm quite happy with the sound and picture they deliver in my parlour, particularly since I discovered the 'widescreen surround' mode. Previously I had been using Audyssey processing with Dolby PL IIx in support of Dolby TrueHD or DTS-HD Master Audio. I have 11 speakers connected (and, importantly, no wife) so front heights, front wides and surround backs – yet the widescreen mode sounds better to me than the Audyssey. No need for two subwoofers in the parlour, though (although the AVR-4810 receiver allows for three to be connected) because in March – following Adam Rayner's recommendation – I bought the SVS PC-12 Plus subwoofer...

I do have two Tannoy TS12 subwoofers in the kitchen connected to a Yamaha RX-V1067 receiver, and the two are definitely better than just one. Incidentally, regarding your comment about placement of multiple subwoofers and what Mr Floyd E. Toole says, in the kitchen I tried one subwoofer at the front and one at the rear, but the combined effect was less than using only the sub in front! So I have them both in front now, actually acting as speaker stands to the front speakers of my system.

But I digress. If you could please tell me which device would allow me to connect two subwoofers to the Yamaha RX-V671 receiver in my bedroom, I would be grateful!
Ken Benjamin, via email

Richard Stevenson replies:
Hi Ken. Firstly, with that many subwoofers in the house and a system in both the bedroom and the kitchen, *HCC* respect is due. The Lindy adapter you purchased should certainly work as we described in the setup and without any hum. We have spoken to the boffins at Tannoy and the ground planes are the same on the TS10 and TS12 so that is not the problem either, leading us to believe the culprit might well be faulty wiring within your Lindy adapter. My personal preference is for cable-based splitters as they can offer better performance and certainly give you more room around the back of the amp. Check out cable adapters such as the Audioquest FLX-X splitter or Monster's slightly bonkers UHP Y-adapter MkII. Both of these will plug straight into the LFE output of the receiver and give you two female phonos. These will accept your standard subwoofer phone interconnect cables. Don't forget to experiment with the phase control of each subwoofer to ensure the outputs are not cancelling each other out (which looks like what might have happened in your kitchen) and re-run the Yamaha's YPAO room EQ to balance the system.

Star Wars cop out

I enjoyed the Sci-Fi Movie Marathon feature (*HCC* 210) but can't believe you included such films as *The Fifth Element* and *Starship Troopers*, but left out any of the *Star Wars* movies. Surely, as the most famous sci-fi films ever made, they ought to have featured?
Sean Thomson, via email

We only had 24 hours to play with! Of course, *Star Wars* featured heavily in our minds when we plotted the movie marathon, but we couldn't work out which one to choose – our first idea was to include the whole original trilogy at some point, but that didn't leave room much else. And watching ...*A New Hope* without the following sequels just doesn't seem right.

And anyway, what's wrong with The Fifth Element? Apart from Chris Tucker, of course

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REVIEWS

→Hardware highlights **JVC** Reference-grade D-ILA X90 projector **JAMO** THX Ultra2-certified 5.2 array **SONY** Mid-range seven-channel AVR **ECHOSTAR** Ultrathin Freeview HD PVR **SONOS** Multiroom music system **Q ACOUSTICS** 2000i 5.1 sub/sat package **EPSON** EH-TW9000 3D projector **REL** 8in subwoofer **GROUPTEST** 10 bigscreen TVs go head-to-head **AND MORE!**

Silver service



Yamaha's new RX-V473 AV receiver brings hi-tech streaming to the masses. See p66 for more...

HCC Ratings key

Outstanding	1 2 3 4 **5**
Above average	1 2 3 **4** 5
Acceptable	1 2 **3** 4 5
Disappointing	1 **2** 3 4 5
Dire	**1** 2 3 4 5

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When only the best will do

MONSTER SPECIAL

JVC hand picks just the best-quality components for its flagship projectors, leaving **John Archer** startled by the results

Considering JVC's DLA-X90 projector costs £3,000 more than the brand's 'step down' X70, at first glance it doesn't apparently do a great deal to justify the extra cash.

It looks the same as the cheaper model, for starters, with its decently compact body and agreeable industrial sculpting. It's also got the same eShift 4K technology (more on this later), and shares the same THX and ISF endorsements. Plus it essentially uses the same D-ILA engine as the X70, complete with the Wire Grid Optical Engine that's been key in making JVC projectors so consistently great since 2006.

In fact, at first glance there's only one significant spec difference between the X70 and its more expensive sibling: a claimed contrast ratio of 120,000:1 on the flagship model versus 80,000:1 for the X70.

This is important in itself, of course, since adding another 50 per cent to the already stunning contrast performance of the X70 is a scintillating prospect – especially as JVC's contrast ratio figures are always native, rather than derived from the potentially distracting machinations of a dynamic iris system.

However, it's when you look for the reasons behind the extra contrast that you get to the heart of the X90's premium status. The deal is that all X90s are built using exclusively 'AAA' optical components, hand-selected from JVC's production lines because they deliver the highest level of operating perfection.

I guess this could sound fishy to some. After all, most flagship products use different chipsets or optics to distinguish themselves from cheaper models. But with the use of only AAA-grade components also potentially boosting the X90's sharpness due to improved convergence from its three D-ILA chipsets, I'm content for now to accept JVC's approach in good faith.

Pro-level picture tweaks

The X90 has another feature that you don't get with the X70: professional colour calibration via a PC and proprietary software. Clearly with this you're entering the domain of the professional custom installer, but it's a touch that should curry favour with these high-end AV players.

You don't have to go the custom install route to secure an X90, however, so it's great to report that setup is relatively easy, at least on a basic level. The PJ offers control of zoom, focus and vertical/horizontal image shift via the backlit handset, and the extent of available zoom and image shifting is outstanding.

Things get more complicated if you explore the selection of picture tweaks available. The X90 features full colour/gamma management systems – as well as numerous general image and colour presets – plus more motion processing and noise reduction options than you can shake a test disc at. But the menus, while bland, are straightforward to navigate, and the core presets – especially the THX and Cinema ones – are fine if you'd rather not tinker yourself.

The X90 is, as with all JVC's current projectors, 3D capable. Two pairs of glasses are bundled free, as well as an external transmitter that connects to the projector's rear. Personally I don't mind this external transmitter approach as it lets you install the projector without having to worry about possible sync problems.

Dark star

The X70 was one of the very finest projectors I've ever tested. But it takes mere moments to see that the X90 is better.

My favourite test disc right now is the Blu-ray of the final Harry Potter film – especially the beginning of Chapter 12, where Voldemort launches his army's assault on Hogwarts. Even the best TVs and projectors tend to struggle with the extreme darkness of this sequence – but not the X90. Instead, it breezes through it, thanks to an ability to produce the best black levels I've ever seen from any projector – including high-end SIM2 models and the X70. So rich, deep, grey-free and natural are the X90's black levels, in fact, that it's hard to see how JVC could possibly make them >



Remote: Backlit and uncluttered. We like

AV/CV

PRODUCT: D-ILA 3D projector, endorsed by THX and built using only the highest-grade optics

POSITION: JVC's current flagship home projector for the UK

PEERS: SIM2 Nero 1; JVC DLA-X70; Sony VPL-VW95ES



The X90 employs higher-quality components than its step-down X70 sibling – and to great effect





Heart of the action: Connections are housed alongside basic controls

any better. I remember saying the same thing about JVC's previous projector generation, too...

Equally enticing is the stability with which dark scenes are presented. The lack of a dynamic iris certainly plays its part here. With the X90, the gamma and brightness levels remain rock solid from beginning to end.

The X90's lack of a dynamic iris also means that its immaculate blacks can co-exist within the same frame as bright, punchy colours and pure, bold whites, as there's no need for the image's overall brightness level to be compromised during shadowy scenes.

> 'The X90 produces the best black levels I've seen from any projector – including higher-end models'

The X90's use of triple-A optical components also seems to improve its sharpness versus the X70. This is an impressive feat, given that I was already content with the X70's pixel power – particularly the eShift 4K system that makes HD images appear denser and more like filmlike in the flawlessness of their finish.

Before you ask, the '4K' images from the JVC are no match for the sheer majesty of a genuine 4K feed fed into Sony's VPL-VW1000ES, nor that model's own upscaling talents. For now, Sony has that particular niche segment of the consumer projector market sewn up. Just remember that it costs £7,000 more and isn't as accomplished in other areas – black levels in particular.

The X90 delivers a minor improvement over the X70 where colours are concerned. Saturation levels are similarly excellent, but there seems to be a fraction more finesse in the X90's handling of subtle blends. Other typical JVC strengths, such as clean and natural motion reproduction, and near total freedom from video noise, are in evidence.

Not such a bright spark

The only weakness of the X90's 2D images is that its pictures aren't bright enough to drive truly gargantuan (above 150in or even 175in) screen sizes in the same way that many SIM2 models can. But clearly this issue won't affect many people. The slight shortage of brightness also means that the X90's 3D pictures aren't as dynamic as those of some rival premium 3D projectors – although the images aren't by any means too dim to enjoy.

There's also more crosstalk when watching 3D than I'd ideally like to see, and detail levels look marginally reduced versus 2D because the eShift technology doesn't work on stereoscopic images.

If you're an absolute 3D obsessive, then maybe the X90's minor issues could turn your head elsewhere. But if you spend the majority of your time watching 2D, then JVC's flagship PJ is nothing short of magnificent, and well worth the extra cost over the X70 – if you're lucky enough to have so much cash lying around, of course.

→Analysis

GUI: The onscreen menus overlay a small portion of the projected image. Navigation is straightforward
Killer feature: The claimed increase in contrast of the X90 is easily believed once you've witnessed the ultra-deep black levels it can produce alongside vibrant peak whites. This is a reference-grade performance

→Specifications

3D: *YES* Active
Full HD: *YES* 1,920 x 1,080 resolution, plus eShift technology
Connections: 2 x v1.4 HDMIs; 1 component video input; 1 x 9-pin RS-232 port; 1 x D-Sub PC port; 1 x 12V trigger jack; 1 x remote mini jack; 1 x LAN; 1 x 3D Sync port
Brightness (claimed): 1200 Lumens
Contrast (claimed): 120,000:1 native
Dimensions: 455(w) x 179(h) x 472(d)mm
Weight: 15.4kg
Features: D-ILA projection technology; 3,000-hour lamp life in normal mode; 2x optical zoom; motorised zoom and focus controls; extensive vertical and horizontal image shifting; 20dB running noise in normal lamp mode; 360W power consumption; pro-standard colour calibration via PC; colour and gamma management; THX and ISF endorsements; JVC's proprietary motion processing system



HCC VERDICT

JVC DLA-X90 → £10,000 Approx
→ Supplier: www.jvc.co.uk
→ Tel: 0845 3108000

Highs: Extremely good 2D pictures; lots of set up flexibility; 3D glasses included in the price; quiet runner
Lows: 3D images suffer a little crosstalk and aren't especially bright

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 4 **5**

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Jamo offers power and precision

The Danish audio brand's new THX Ultra2-certified speaker package leaves **Danny Phillips** thumbing his thesaurus for words other than 'brilliant'



All but the twin subwoofers are designed for wall-mounting in a dedicated cinema room

Fresh from auditioning Crystal Acoustics' THX Ultra2-certified T2-5.2-UL system (see the last issue), we now have another George Lucas-approved speaker set threatening to break the test bench. But aside from their THX Ultra2 certification and 5.2-channel configuration, the two systems couldn't be more different. Whereas the Crystal Acoustics set relied on voluminous front floorstanders to deliver its room-filling sound, Jamo has gone for slightly more compact wall-mountable speakers.

How does this array meet the exacting THX Ultra2 certification with such comparatively small speakers? After all, filling a room of up to 3,000 cubic feet and reaching the THX Reference Level (85dB with 20dB of headroom) without clipping or distorting is no mean feat.

Well, the key is those two subwoofers – the D 600 LCRs used for the front and centre only cover bass frequencies down to 80Hz, leaving the ultra-low stuff to the subs, which team up to reach the sort of super-loud levels you'd hear in the cinema or a sound engineer's studio. You might not need two to fill your own viewing room, but it's the only way to get the full THX monty.

Even without the THX badge this would still be a serious system. The five surround speakers are encased in incredibly sturdy cabinets, each one feeling as solid as you'd expect for the money.

The D 600 LCRs used for the front left, front right and centre speakers are identical, a way of ensuring they're tonally matched across the soundstage. Their cuboid shape and shallow depth is fairly unusual but ideal for wall-mounting, all made possible by their reduced bass responsibilities – with two hulking subs doing the low-end donkey-work, cabinet depth is less of an issue. >

AV/CV

PRODUCT: THX Ultra2-certified 5.2-channel speaker system

POSITION: Up from the Select2-certified D 500 package in Jamo's stable

PEERS: Crystal Acoustics T2-5.2-UL; Teufel System 10





Double jeopardy: Use two of the Jamo subs (bottom left) for a serious low-end performance

Also part of the package is a pair of D 600 SUR dipole rear speakers, built into similarly robust cabinets that feel like they could stop a tank in its tracks. These three-way designs feature a single 6.5in front-firing woofer, with a 3in midrange driver and 1in tweeter on each side that spread non-directional effects along the sides of the room, in keeping with THX's idea of home cinema utopia.

So you get a lot of speaker for your money, but these chunky cabinets are something of an acquired taste.

> 'With film soundtracks, the Jamo system delivers cinematic thrills with clarity, insight and poise'

They're not ugly *per se* – the grey, slightly glittery finish is quite fetching – but some may find the design too industrial. It's the sort of system that only an AV freak could love.

Crank it up

It's clear that the D 600 was born to play movies, and play them LOUD. I don't imagine Jamo's engineers fretted too much over how it would sound playing the silky strains of Beethoven – this is a system designed to replicate the mind-blowing multiplex experience in your home, and as such does an astonishingly good job. With the demo-worthy train crash scene from *Super 8*, for example, the D 600 delivers a real visceral thrill.

Before the carnage kicks off, the build-up is textbook tension. The eerie, near-silent atmosphere of the deserted station is punctuated by footsteps hitting the floor with a tight, life-like thud. Multi-layered dialogue scuttles from every channel, wind hisses crisply around the soundstage and the ambience is decorated by delicate high-frequency clicks as Charles fiddles with his equipment. It's beautifully arranged and hints that there's much more to this system than mere muscle.

As the train passes, the two 600W subwoofers convincingly convey a sense of metallic momentum. Get close enough and you can feel them moving gusts of air. And when the van hits the train, Jamo unleashes hell. The initial impact rattles your rib cage and the subs deploy rich, largescale full-bodied bass, meshing tightly with the speakers. Slabs of metal fly around with a ferocious clank, sounding suitably spiky yet stripped of any trace of harshness.

Underpinning this flurry of fast, boisterous energy is a sense of clarity and realism. Each effect within the soundstage is reproduced with wonderful precision, transparency and consistency of tone that fully vindicates Jamo's choice of drivers.

And the Jamo's silence is almost as impressive as its sound. When the alien blows the hatch off the train, a few seconds of beautiful stillness is shattered by a potent crunch as it hits the ground, demonstrating how well it handles quick dynamic shifts. Dialogue is also imbued with nuance.

Authoritative package

This heavyweight package gets deeper inside a soundtrack than the Crystal Acoustics T2-5.2-UL, which is where the Jamo justifies its much higher price, alongside its generally greater sense of authority.

If there's a flaw it's that the D 600 isn't as comfortable with music as movies, but it's not designed to be a jack of all trades, simply a master of one. With films it delivers cinematic thrills with clarity, insight and precision, and the dual subs provide all the slam you'll ever need. Looks aside, this is home cinema perfection

➜Specifications

D 600 LCR fronts
Drive units: 2 x 6.5in woofers; 2 x 3in midrange drivers; 1 x 1in tweeter with decoupled tweeter technology (DTT)
Frequency response: 80Hz-20kHz
Sensitivity: 89dB
Power handling (max): 200W
Dimensions: 600(w) x 315(h) x 170(d)mm
Weight: 13kg

D 600 SUR rears
Drive units: 1 x 6.5in front-firing woofer; 2 x 3in midrange drivers; 2 x 1in DTT tweeters
Frequency response: 80Hz-20kHz
Sensitivity: 87dB
Power handling (max): 150W
Dimensions: 454(w) x 255(h) x 170(d)mm
Weight: 9kg

D 600 SUB subwoofer
Drive units: 1 x 15in woofer
Frequency response: 20Hz-200Hz
On board power: 600W (RMS)
Dimensions: 557(w) x 587(h) x 501(d)mm
Weight: 32kg
Connections: Stereo phono input and passthrough; LFE input and passthrough; speaker-level input; 12V trigger



HCC VERDICT

Jamo D 600 5.2 ➜ £3,500 Approx
➜ Supplier: www.bbg.eu.com
➜ Tel: 01923 205610

Highs: Thunderous sound; superb clarity and imaging; lots of box for the money
Lows: Industrial design; not suited to music playback

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 **5**

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Wi-Fi warrior

Sony embraces next-gen audio with the STR-DN1030, its first Wi-Fi-enabled AV receiver. It takes more than a few clever gizmos to impress curmudgeon **Steve May**, though – can this AVR deliver on all fronts?

The STR-DN1030 is Sony's latest attempt to rule the affordable AVR market

The STR-DN1030 comes to the hotly-contested £500 AVR middle ground with some memorable Sony firsts up its sleeve, specifically integrated Wi-Fi and Apple AirPlay. But can this forward-thinking spec win back the ground lost to the brand's brasher, feature-stacked rivals?

Cosmetically, this new AVR is swish enough. There's a relatively modest LCD display, but a string of function buttons underneath make it easy to drive. There are front-facing AV phonos and USB for temporary connections, and a 3.5mm input for the supplied calibration microphone.

Rear-panel connectivity will similarly suit most buyers. There are five 3D-compatible HDMI inputs, plus two component inputs and a couple of phono AV options. SD content routed via the latter is upscaled to 1080i when viewed via the solitary HDMI output. Digital audio is represented by two optical inputs, and one coaxial. There are also two subwoofer feeds.

The remote looks daunting but transpires to be very easy to use. Most of the key functionality offered by the STR-DN1030 is accessible directly via dedicated buttons. This means there's no need to visit the menu system on a daily basis.

System configuration

The STR-DN1030 is a seven-channel design, and offers the requisite number of extra binding posts. You can configure these to give rear surround channels, or stick with normal surrounds and implement extra front-height channels instead.

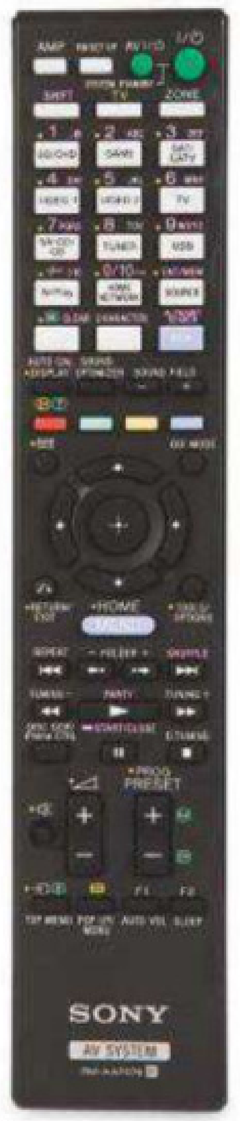
> 'Streaming AC/DC's *Hells Bells* in FLAC through the Berlin Philharmonic DSP is foot-stomping fun'

You'll need a high ceiling if you opt for heights, though, as these should be positioned at least a metre above the front stereo pair, and towed down toward the listening area, in order to be effective.

If you don't care for either a surround-back or a front-height arrangement, you can opt to bi-amp your main L/R enclosures, or send stereo to a second zone.

Of course, the most visible adornment on the rear is the Wi-Fi aerial, which is parked next to the Ethernet port. This needs to be hoisted erect if you want to get networked *sans* wires.

The STR-DN1030's feature spec may intimate that it's an advanced piece of kit, but the user interface is extremely basic, consisting of little more than a simple text menu. There's no HDMI overlay or animated graphics; just a button to turn the GUI On or Off. This UI is also cursed with a limited character window. For example, investigate the stripped down Sony Entertainment Network and you're presented with a simplistic menu offering either vTuner internet radio access or Sony's Music Unlimited subscription service. The AVR implores you to 'Select the desi'. You're given just enough time to scratch your head before the message continues and '...red service' scrolls into view. Sony says this AVR is lumbered with a 15-character display because it predates the development cycle >



Remote: Not as cluttered as some, with most functions covered by direct buttons



AV/CV

PRODUCT: 7.1 AVR with AirPlay, integrated Wi-Fi and internet radio

POSITION: Mid-range in Sony's STR receiver lineup

PEERS: Onkyo TX-NR717; Yamaha RX-V573

responsible for the high-res UI seen on the upmarket STR-DA5700ES. Guess that means it started work on this model back in 1997.

The USB media reader interface is equally poor. You can't easily navigate the contents of a USB stick, leaving little option but to play files in order. Such frugality makes for a fairly ropey user experience.

The AVR is DLNA-compliant and can stream audio from NAS and PCs on your home network (there is no video file support). File compatibility is good, though, with MP3, AAC, WMA and FLAC all playable. The interface remains bare-bones, with no artwork support. The USB reader cannot play FLAC files, only MP3, AAC and WMA. Sony says this isn't a problem, as sticks are generally only used for compressed files.

Naturally, both Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio decoding is offered, but it's worth noting that the DTS-HD MA implementation is limited here to a sampling rate of 96kHz. The receiver does, however, support 192kHz over eight channels in PCM mode.

Jolly nice setup

Sony's auto calibration system, dubbed DCAC (Digital Cinema Auto Calibration), takes little more than 30 seconds to check for phase, adjust levels and balance EQ. The process is even bookended by jolly tunes. As a room-tuning tool it's extremely well judged, and does a fine job of matching receiver to environment. Measurements are ignored when the A Direct mode is selected, or when a lossless soundtrack with a frequency higher than 48kHz is played.

The AVR's Wi-Fi implementation is a little fiddly. Once you've scanned for your access point, you have the option of connecting via WPS (Wi-Fi Protected Setup). This is the best option if your router supports it, as trying to input a WEP key proves to be a Krypton-sized challenge. The AVR's key pad is dual-function, used to select both inputs (BD, TV, SAT etc) and alpha numeric keys. Try and enter a password and you're taken to the associated source input instead. This is because the instruction manual neglects to tell you to hold down the Shift key before entering a code. If you have the option, choose a wired connection instead.

The STR-DN1030 boasts a selection of proprietary sound processing modes, of which HD-DCS (HD Digital Cinema Sound) is particularly interesting. Using data measured in a Sony recording studio, it extends the surround field, effectively adding air to soundtracks. But there can be unfortunate consequences. The opening narration for Luc Besson's *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec* (Blu-ray), which is placed firmly in the centre channel, becomes completely unlistenable thanks to unwanted HD-DCS reverb.

> 'This is a terrific-sounding AV receiver – multichannel movies are delivered with artful bombast'

Naturally there's also a mixture of music DSPs, of which the Berlin Philharmonic Hall is the best. Streaming AC/DC's *Hells Bells* in FLAC through the Berlin P. Hall mode is foot-stomping fun – made all the more enjoyable given it's unlikely to ever happen for real.

While the user interface may look antediluvian, plenty of innovation lurks beneath the STR-DN1030's



Connections

A Lone ranger

The STR-DN1030 offers a single HDMI output in partnership with five inputs. Standard-def material from analogue sources can be upscaled over HDMI to 1080i – while last year's STR-DH820 will upscale to 1080p. Weird.

B Wi-Fi beacon

If you want to make use of the Sony's built-in Wi-Fi, you'll need to extend this rear-mounted antenna

C Digital fallbacks

This bank of digital audio inputs (two optical, one coaxial) is on hand for older, non-HDMI sources

D Extra options

The STR-DN1030's sixth and seventh channels can be used for front-height channels, rear surround, bi-amping or feeding a second zone with stereo audio



bonnet. There's a newly-developed wideband power amp circuit, in which circuits are configured directly onto an aluminium board. The result is less noise and significant production savings. There are also a couple of large Sony-made electrolytic capacitors, chosen for their ability to deliver huge transients.

Build quality is excellent. While the chassis is rolled metal, Sony has strategically carved diamond-shaped notches near the heat sink, after deducing this helps reduce structural resonance (don't try this at home). The base of the receiver also sports ribs to improve rigidity.

One particularly ingenious tweak can be found on the feet of the unit. On the brand's higher-end ES-branded AVRs, these feature an offset mounting-design that is complicated to manufacture. Here the feet are obviously simpler, but Sony has added an offset lug which does much the same job as the ES boots when it comes reducing mechanical vibration. Such attention to detail inspires confidence when it comes to performance and longevity.

Despite its modest price point, such audiophile tweaks can be found all over this product. This is because it's been a pet project of Takashi Kanai, Sony's Chief Distinguished Engineer. Kanai even came up with his own solder, unhappy with the original lead-free recipe. But does all this tinkering really make any sense if, at the end of the day, you're going to park a whacking big Wi-Fi transmitter next to the power supply?

Rich and rewarding

Well, apparently so. In full flight, the STR-DN1030 is rich and rewarding. Avant-garde jazz release *Chaotic Planet* by HYPS (SACD) is an extremely dynamic 4.0 multichannel mix, and the STR-DN1030 tackles it with poise. Perhaps this is not too surprising, given that the designer Kanai also oversaw the recording of said disc. Delivery via multichannel PCM has verve and musicality.

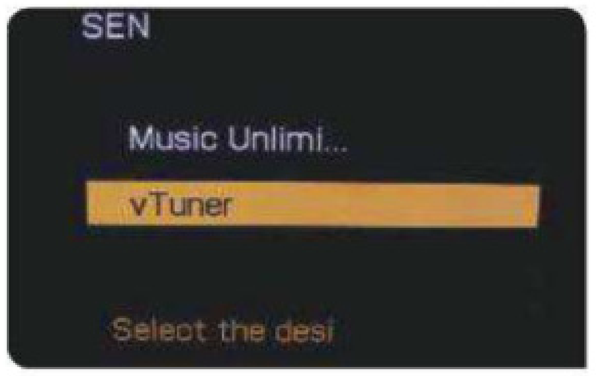
I was amazed to discover that when you flip from multichannel HDMI to two-channel analogue stereo, there's no huge sonic sacrifice. Sure, you lose the wraparound channels, but the stereo imaging is virtually three-dimensional. The receiver may not have the endless dynamics of a high-end box, but it certainly doesn't sound like a £500 one either.

Ramp up the volume and the STR-DN1030 doesn't run ragged. Sony rates the power output at 150W per-channel into 8 Ohms (albeit with 10 per cent THD) and it stays tight. In two-channel mode, the model delivers 105W with 1 per cent THD. Much of the receiver's visceral grunt comes via a surprisingly chunky power transformer. Apparently the brand went through 45 iterations before deciding on the large EL core type used here. Indeed, it's so large it needs a reinforced mounting perch.

Despite a sizeable heat sink, the AVR can run warm. Halfway though Luc Besson's fantasy romp, it became as hot as the titular heroine.

Overall, the STR-DN1030 is an intriguing proposition. With integrated Wi-Fi and AirPlay, it plays a convincing contemporary card, yet offers a user experience that is far from slick thanks to a skeletal UI and some clunky implementation. On the other hand, it delivers where it counts. This is a terrific-sounding receiver with an accommodating character – stereo sources and multichannel movies are delivered with artful bombast. Recommended then, albeit with caveats

→Analysis



GUI: The STR-DN1030 offers decidedly budget menus that are text-based and devoid of animated graphics. If we were feeling kind we'd describe them as retro

Killer feature: This AVR uses its solid construction as the basis for an engaging, musical sound quality that's easily worth the £500 asking price – your BD deck will love it

→Specifications

Dolby Digital TrueHD: *YES*
DTS-HD Master Audio: *YES*
THX: *NO*
Multichannel audio: *YES* 7 x 150W into 8 Ohms
Multichannel input: *NO*
Multiroom: *YES* one zone, stereo audio only
AV inputs: 3 x digital audio inputs (2 x optical and 1 x coaxial); 2 x stereo audio inputs; 2 x composite video inputs; 1 x USB, 1 x FM aerial input; 1 x Ethernet jack
HDMI input/output: *YES* 5 x inputs and 1 output, v1.4a (supports 3D video and Audio Return Channel)
Video upscaling: *YES* to 1080i
Component input/output: yes 2-in, 1-out
Dimensions: 430(w) x 158(h) x 323(d)mm
Weight: 10.2kg
Also featuring: Auto Room calibration; USB audio file playback; DLNA audio streaming; integrated Wi-Fi; AirPlay; FM/AM tuner; SEN (Sony Entertainment Network) featuring Music Unlimited and vTuner internet radio; post-processing modes including HD-DCS

HCC VERDICT

Sony STR-DN1030 → £500 Approx
→ Supplier: www.sony.co.uk
→ Tel: 08705 111 999

Highs: Wi-Fi built-in; AirPlay; rich musical character; audio file support across a LAN; good auto calibration
Lows: Bare bones UI; no FLAC playback from USB; curious post-processing modes

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Return to slender

Echostar's new Freeview HD PVR is the thinnest in the world. **Adrian Justins** looks beyond the sleek design to see what else it has to offer



We've been blathering on for yonks about how TV screens have become skinnier than a size-zero model, but now it's the PVR's turn on the catwalk, with Echostar's newest set-top box measuring a mere 14mm high. So yes, the HDT-610R is unquestionably entitled to its infinitely more catchy alternative name of Ultra Slim Box.

Echostar has crafted the unit out of some reassuringly rigid metal and given the box an attractive, minimalist look with curved corners and an absence of visual clues as to its intended purpose. The on/off button on its front spine is heavily disguised, and you can barely read the smattering of logos. Only the tiny LED lamp gives the game away, lightly glowing blue in standby, brighter when switched on and red when recording.

The main benefit of its size is that the Ultra Slim Box can go in the sort of narrow gap that the Humaxes of this world can only dream about. But to shove it away out of sight would be a crying shame, especially since its remarkable looks come at a relatively premium price. Away from its physical appearance the Ultra Slim Box's specifications don't make for a terribly compelling proposition for a £260 unit.

Connections

Fortunately, most contemporary connections measure less than 14mm in height so it's no surprise to see the Echostar toting a jack pack that consists of an HDMI v1.3 output, Ethernet, RF loopthrough, a pair of USB ports, an IR blaster socket and a mini TOSLINK, for which a full-size digital optical audio adapter is provided. Unusually, both HDMI and Ethernet cables are also supplied – a thoughtful touch that will save casual buyers a second trip to the shops.

Those USB ports gave me hope of a media player lurking within the Ultra Slim Box, but sadly not. Nor is there scope for a wireless dongle to liberate this PVR from its tethered network connection.

Ultra slim: The HDT-610R stands only 14mm high

AV/CV

PRODUCT: Freeview+ HD PVR

POSITION: Echostar's only Freeview product, alongside the HDS-600RS Freesat PVR

PEERS: Panasonic DMR-HW220; Sony SVR-HDT1000, Humax HDR-FOX T2

In fact, the Echostar's networking capabilities are nothing to really get excited about either. At the time of testing there were no Smart TV services working, and although BBC's iPlayer and Box Office 365 should be active by now, there isn't a guarantee that other apps will arrive in the near future aside from the subscription-based Picture Box Movies. With YouView's long-delayed IPTV-heavy service launching now in the shape of Humax's DTR-T1000, Echostar's slinky unit feels a bit under-served in this department.

One more niggle concerns the bundled remote control. This is no aesthetic match for the PVR itself, is very lightweight, and offers



Storemags

labels on the crammed buttons that are hard to read except in strong ambient light.

On the plus side, the Ultra Slim Box is about as taxing to set up as it is chunky. While the initial Freeview channel-scan took nearly 10 minutes, I was quickly up and running after an easy network setup, thanks to a very intuitive user interface. Press 'menu' on the remote and you're presented with a narrow column of clip-art style icons that don't dominate the screen. And within the settings menu you can alter the transparency of the sub-menus to allow simultaneous viewing and tinkering.

The EPG is similarly translucent, but takes up the full width of the screen. It's a pleasant-looking guide

> 'The four high-definition channels are rock-solid in terms of sharpness, detail and visual punch'

that sensibly adopts a basic colour scheme of white text on black.

Eco warriors will appreciate the Ultra Slim Box's meagre power consumption of just 11W even when using both tuners.

Record breaker

Scheduled recordings are highlighted in red. When selecting a show for recording the Echostar offers you one-off or Series Link options. Thankfully there is a way to manually buffer recordings but this has to be done elsewhere, using a sub-menu within the settings where you can add up to 10 minutes to the start and end. One nice feature is that you can remove the prompt concerning Series Linking every time you select a show, while two very handy buttons on the remote activate an instantaneous leap forwards or backwards during playback, and you can set the time interval between 10 and 60 seconds.



Remote: Nicely laid out but challenging to use in low light

Accessing and playing back programmes is a cinch – press Library on the handset to see a list of recordings, with series automatically placed in folders and unwatched shows clearly flagged. A gauge shows how much of the 500GB HDD has been filled.

Timeshifting tricks include chasing playback and watching one recording whilst making two others – this is, remember, a twin-tuner offering. When fast-forwarding/rewinding you go through the settings cycle in one direction (so you can't return to 32x from 64x), or press play to cancel.

Editing of recordings is basic at best, with nothing beyond renaming, locking and marking as new, but how many people go beyond watch-n-wipe these days?

Pristine performance

Aside from a slightly disconcerting noise coming from the Echostar as the electronics crunch and whir – even in non-recording mode – there's very little about the performance to find fault with. Standard-definition Freeview images are as robust as you could hope for, with seemingly as much clarity – and as little noise – as a comparable Sky broadcast, and the four HD channels are rock-solid in terms of sharpness, detail and visual punch, distinctly showing every furrow of Nick Hewer's frown during *Countdown*. Recordings are, as you'd hope, a precise replica of the original broadcast.

Overall, this is a decent PVR, with a design that will appeal to fashionistas – and one that makes installation a breeze. The well-constructed user interface, meanwhile, makes up for the basic, lightweight handset. Yet the lack of any media playing capability and sparse IPTV provision may turn you off. These days, not being able to plumb in a USB stick to view JPEGs seems almost criminal. In fact, we're left wondering exactly what the pair of USB ports are for. Nor might you feel that BBC iPlayer and Box Office 365 truly cut the mustard in terms of video-on-demand. It will be interesting to see if future updates are able to add to the Echostar's appeal ●



IPTV-lite: It looks smart, but the Echostar's Smart TV capabilities are limited at present

→Analysis



GUI: The interface is clean and effective – although one or two menu options are located in rather odd places

Killer feature: There's no getting away from the Echostar's groundbreaking design – and it makes this set-top box easy to accommodate when space is limited

→Specifications

HDD: YES 500GB
Tuner: YES 2 x Freeview HD
Connections: 1 x HDMI v1.3; 1 x optical audio; 1 x Ethernet; RF loopthrough; 2 x USB; IR extender; external power supply
Dimensions: 270(w) x 14(h) x 204(d)mm
Weight: 0.82kg
Features: 7-day EPG; BBC iPlayer, Box Office 365 apps; Dolby Digital+; 1080p upscaler; TV control codes; parental control; favourites lists; 60-minute buffer; capacity approx 125 hours of HD shows or 300 hours standard-definition; English, Welsh, Gaelic subtitles



HCC VERDICT

Echostar HDT-610R Ultra Slim Box→£260 Approx
→Supplier: www.myechostar.com→Tel: 01535 659000

Highs: Thin but solidly built; slick EPG; excellent-quality pics and sound
Lows: Scant Smart TV offering; noisy box; limited editing facilities

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Storemags.com

Musical mastermind

Sonos has added a dedicated subwoofer to its range of wireless multiroom speakers. **Mark Craven** has never had so much fun prowling the house



See-through: The new subwoofer (centre) sports an eye-catching design

Sonos is often praised for introducing the concept of multiroom audio to the masses, thanks to its scalable range of wireless speakers and docks that major on simple use and easy connectivity. The goal of a Sonos system is to stream music to multiple zones throughout your house with a minimum of fuss and without ripping up the floorboards – and it works.

New this year is the £600 Sonos SUB, which, as its name suggests, is intended to bring a serious level of bass to your listening experience. It's reviewed here within a typical setup – two Play: 3 speakers (£260 each) and the Wi-Fi Bridge complete the set.

Setup is as simple as ever – it takes a push of a button to connect the SUB to an existing Sonos network, and you can then tweak its level via the Sonos Controller software, either on your PC or iOS/Android device. The demo sequence is a hoot, with an undulating bassline that shows you the woofer's talents.

Once up and running, it's immediately obvious that the SUB adds a new level of performance to the Play: 3 speakers. Where the Play: 3's drivers previously delivered a well-rounded but somewhat smallscale sound, they're now underpinned by an impressively low-reaching woofer that expands the soundstage considerably – and should offer more than enough grunt for even the most demanding of audiophiles. Of course, you'll find it suits certain content better than others – while its power was much appreciated with Metallica's *ReLoad* album, it did nothing for BBC radio other than to make Richard Bacon sound like Brian Blessed. Thankfully, you can turn it off and on via the Sonos user interface.

So what does your £600 get you in hardware terms? Quite possibly one of the cutest woofers ever produced. The SUB sports a 'polo mint' design where the inner hole houses two opposed drivers (size unspecified), and a gloss black, luxurious finish. Very smart.

Hard to beat

It's not easy to convey how much of a joy Sonos' system is to use, especially with the SUB now added to the mix. The foolproof setup and control are first-rate, the configuration options flexible and the variety of music options available (steaming platforms like Last.FM, iTunes syncing, internet radio) is dizzying. Sure, it's not the most affordable solution around (particularly as you'll be tempted to add more players in more zones), but it's hard to beat. Buyers won't be disappointed ●

AV/CV

PRODUCT: Multizone wireless audio system

POSITION: Play: 3 can be upgraded to larger Play: 5 cabinets

PEERS: Canton your_World; Raumfeld by Teufel

→ Specifications

Sonos SUB

Drivers: 2 x bass drivers, facing each other within the cental hole – size unspecified
Onboard power:: Two Class D amps, power unspecified
Frequency response: Down to 25Hz
Dimensions: 402(h) x 158(d) x 380(w)mm
Weight: 16kg
Features: Premium black gloss finish; built-in rubber feet (optional felt feet included); one-touch integration with existing Sonos system; Ethernet and wireless connectivity; dual acoustic ports

Sonos Play: 3

Drivers: 2 x mid-range drivers; 1 x tweeter; 1 x bass driver
Onboard power: Three Class D amps, power unspecified
Dimensions: 132(h) x 268(w) x 160(d)mm
Weight: 2.6kg
Features: One-touch integration with existing Sonos system; Ethernet and wireless connectivity; pair setting enables two to be used in a stereo setup; Windows XP SP3 and higher, Mac OS X v10.6 and higher, NAS devices supporting CIFS for playback of stored files; streaming services including Last.fm, Spotify, Aupeo!; internet radio (with stored favourites); crossfade, shuffle and repeat playback; iTunes and Windows Media Player playlists

HCC VERDICT

Sonos system → £1,150 Approx
→ Supplier: www.sonos.com
→ Tel: 0808 234 6596

Highs: SUB improves sound quality; astonishingly simple to setup and use; smartphone control is excellent;
Lows: Occasional dropouts with 'net radio; not a budget solution

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 4 **5**

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twenty-22

"Immensely open, dynamic and fast with massive musicality" - Hi-Fi Choice, June '12

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- What Hi-Fi?, Jan '12

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION TEST WINNER ★★★★★

twenty-23

"It does a remarkable job of delivering an essentially full bandwidth sound, with fine neutrality and excellent stereo imaging....clean crisp and agile" - Hi-Fi Choice, Jan '12

Hi-Fi Choice RECOMMENDED ★★★★★

twenty-24

"...they captured everything perfectly and had me right on the edge of my seat with excitement"

- Hi-Fi World, June '12

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Dressed to kill

Adam Rayner meets a 5.1 Q Acoustics array that marries smart design with serious sonics. Is the age of the floorstander coming to an end?

Long-term readers will know I have talked about my love of speaker designers – as a gently bonkers breed all of their own – before. For instance, I've witnessed engineers almost come to blows during arguments about tweeters. You have to be deeply passionate about your job to get to that level.

My fascination with the subject of loudspeakers also extends to the politics of speaker design and the way products are conceived. And this is where the Q Acoustics brand is a little bit odd. Instead of the traditional route, which is to get your superstar high-foreheaded designers to dream up superb cost-no-object technologies to incorporate into top-end models, and then let the technology filter-down to lower-cost products for actual bill-paying profit, the Q Acoustics people took a different tack.

They focused their technical and design effort on the more affordable end of the market. Not just a meeting or two in a Chinese factory technology department to knock up a value-for-money speaker, but rather a flying leap at trying to offer something that was almost offensively better than it ought to be



for the money in performance terms, and with a design that everyone would love.

And while the first iteration of the Q Acoustics line of loudspeakers was generally lauded when it launched, this new series, dubbed 2000i, pledges to be even better. That is a necessity in today's market. At this year's Bristol Show, along side the hulking floorstanding arrays, I spied plenty of other brands clamouring for a slice of the upmarket sub/sat pie. They'll have their work cut out, though, as the appeal of these loudspeakers isn't just about their hi-fidelity, it's their flexible installation options and smart design,

The whole shebang

Dubbed the Q Acoustics 2000i Cinema Package, this £750 array collects together two pairs of the 2010i satellite speakers, one centre speaker (the 2000Ci) and one subwoofer (the 2070Si). There are no stands or brackets included, as the brand offers the optional 2000ST stand for the 2010i speakers. You can also get the 2000WB wall bracket, which swivels and angles up and down.

All of the speakers sport a cute, curvaceous shape that doesn't finish square at the bottom, like a normal cabinet, but is rounded. The cable connection is clever, in that there is a recess actually underneath the speaker housing the high-quality binding posts/banana plug sockets. They are in a staggered position, so that your cables turn a corner as they connect. On the 2010i and the 2000Ci centre there is one set, but underneath the step-up 2020i satellites or bigger 2050i floorstanders (because Q Acoustics knows that some of you will always want larger speakers), you get a second pair for bi-wiring.

This tucked-away approach does make initial wiring a bit tricky, but it means the speakers' smooth surfaces remain unmolested, with just the curved port to see on the back.

My review sample was finished in gloss white. Other options are gloss black, graphite or walnut – the latter two are less expensive options that will knock approximately £110 off the package price.

Super sub

The centre is essentially a longer, sideways version of the 2010i (but with an additional midbass driver). The woofer, on the other hand, is dead odd. Firstly, it is suitcase- rather than cuboid-shaped. Secondly, it is also the child of the same designer who likes simple curves and utterly clean lines. It just looks like a larger version of the satellite speakers.

However, this sub is a lot more cunning than it might seem, using a pair of vertically-stacked 6.5in cones, each independently >

In disguise: The 2070Si subwoofer is a stylistic match for the satellite speakers



AV/CV

PRODUCT: Affordable 5.1 system with living room looks

POSITION: The 2000i series tops the Q Acoustics lineup – larger models are available

PEERS: Teufel Theatre 200; Monitor Audio Bronze BR2



Bottoms up: The satellite and centre speakers house their terminals in a recess on the base

driven by a 75W Class D amp, to maintain its slender dimensions. Controls include continuously variable phase adjustment and phase invert, crossover, a Sound Mode selector between Music and AV, and Speaker Type (sealed or vented) for use with a stereo setup.

There's a hefty dollop of digital signal processing (DSP) lurking inside that makes this product swan-like – beautiful, white and elegant on the surface but paddling like fury under the water line.

> 'With ...*Tintin* on Blu-ray, I revelled in the fabulous clarity, definition and intelligibility of this set'

The DSP controls the level of bass produced at the crossover frequency, and the manual, while carefully written to be understandable, goes deeper into how to really set this subwoofer up than most makers even hint at. Admitting it can take hours of listening and basically telling you to experiment.

Thankfully, I have installed a lot of subs and seen a few plots of what goes on when woofers are in my room, so I didn't find it too hard to get a good result.

Men amongst boys

With the array set up and ready to rock, I put began with a multichannel DTS CD. Well, a few in fact, as from Studio Voodoo to Linkin Park and even Boys II Men, I was gently impressed. These speakers are remarkable performers.

The sound was fuller and richer than I was expecting it to be, as one buys floorstanders for largescale sounds. Yet even these smallest models, with the 4in midbass drivers all round, offered an impressive, fat performance.

The snap, attack and punch was remarkable as well – it's clear the transducers are a bit special. The paper cone midbass units tote a fancy ceramic-coating, but it's the high-frequency drivers that are the key. The tweeters are ferrofluid-cooled and decoupled from the rest of the cabinet to avoid unwanted vibrations. Q Acoustics says they will reach up to 22kHz.

I put *The Adventures of Tintin* in my Blu-ray player and revelled in the fabulous clarity, definition and intelligibility of this set. The stylish subwoofer drops deep and grips the bass, proving that there are alternative approaches to a single dustbin-lid-sized driver. The film's jazz-infused intro music was so delicious, with bell trees tinkling and brushed cymbals. In fact, John Williams' score is perfect to show off this package's strong points, with instruments' edges and tones all distinct.

In an early sequence when our hero is doing research, a crack of thunder did find the sub's limit, but that's to be expected at this price point. If you want truly subterranean levels you'll need to increase your budget considerably.

Otherwise, the 2000i 5.1 continually dazzled. Tintin claps eyes on the *Unicorn* ship model and we hear creaking rigging – so realistic it was astonishing; a doorbell goes at his digs in the rear-right channel and I caught myself looking around, feeling silly...

Overall this is a truly remarkable set and utterly recommended. I'd spend my own cash on these – and probably opt for the gloss white, too

→ Specifications

Q Acoustics 2010i
Drive units: 1 x 1in tweeter with ferrofluid cooling/damping; 1 x 4in carbon fibre and ceramic-coated paper cone midbass driver
Enclosure: Rear-ported
Frequency response: 68Hz-22kHz
Sensitivity: 86dB @ 1W/1m
Power handling: 75W
Dimensions: 150(w) x 235(h) x 203(d)mm
Weight: 3.5kg

Q Acoustics 2000Ci centre
Drive units: 1 x 1in tweeter with ferrofluid cooling/damping; 2 x 4in carbon fibre and ceramic-coated paper cone midbass drivers
Enclosure: Rear-ported
Frequency response: 75Hz-22kHz
Sensitivity: 89dB @ 1W/1m
Power handling: 100W
Dimensions: 430(w) x 160(h) x 203(d)mm
Weight: 6kg

Q Acoustics 2070si subwoofer
Drive units: 2 x 6.5in long-throw cones with independent channels of internal amplification
Enclosure: Dual-ported
Frequency response: NA
On board power: 2 x 75W RMS Class D power amplifiers
Remote control: *NO*
Dimensions: 195(w) x 425(h) x 560(d)mm
Weight: 14.6kg
Connections: Stereo line-level input, mono line-level input; speaker-level inputs



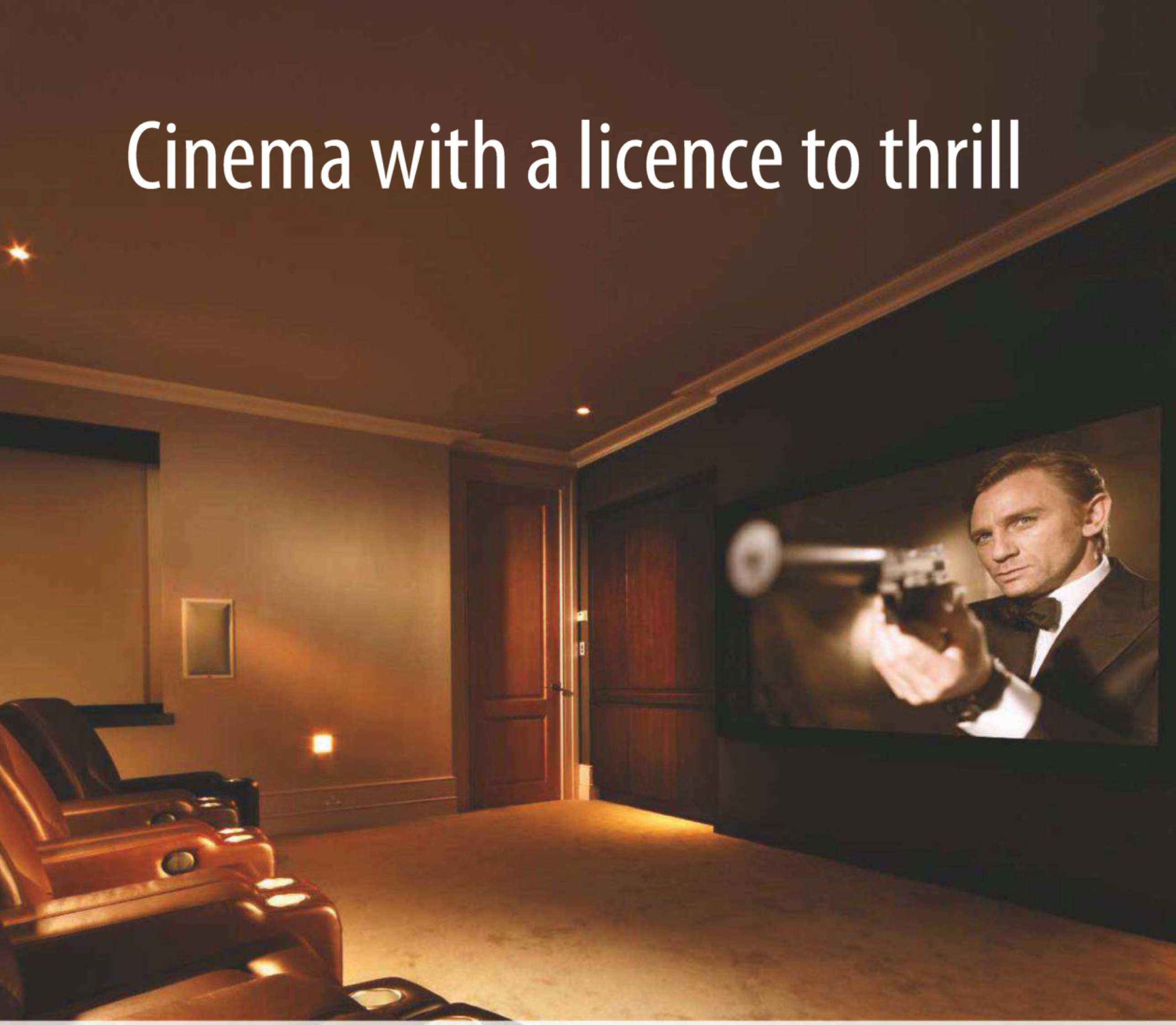
HCC VERDICT

Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1 → £750 Approx
→ Supplier: www.qacoustics.co.uk
→ Tel: 01279 50 11 11

Highs: Neat design and solid build; crisp, detailed sound; impressive scale considering the price
Lows: Complexity of the subwoofer setup might irritate

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 **5**

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Stream queen

Yamaha's new entry-level receiver majors on networking and AirPlay, so can the RX-V473 still cut it at the movies? **Richard Stevenson** reports

It was only a matter of time before Yamaha was forced to incorporate some technology from Cupertino. The company's latest AV receivers are quite a departure from previous models and now pack in full Apple AirPlay and networking functionality in all but the entry-level model. The RX-V473 reviewed here is one step up the five-strong x73 series ladder, coming to the table with an Ethernet port, DLNA compatibility and the ability to stream music to it from your iPhone, iPad or any PC running iTunes. Add to this 4K and 3D HDMI passthrough for a bit of future-proofing, plus a number of 'ECO' modes for lower energy consumption, and it is clear that the RX-V473 is very much an AV receiver for today's market.

Of course, all that technology, particularly those expensive AirPlay licenses, has meant something of a frugal specification sheet where home cinema functionality is concerned. This £340 model is stoically five-channel, offers no upscaling, has very basic YPAO setup and EQ, and is a little light in the power department. Yamaha quotes a fair-sounding 5 x 80W, but that is a 6 Ohm load with only two channels driven. In reality, with all five channels playing the full frequency spectrum into 8 Ohm speakers, the RX-V473 likely produces no more than about 60-70W per-channel maximum. Mind you, ten years ago that was considered a beefy amp, so maybe that is just an issue of perception.

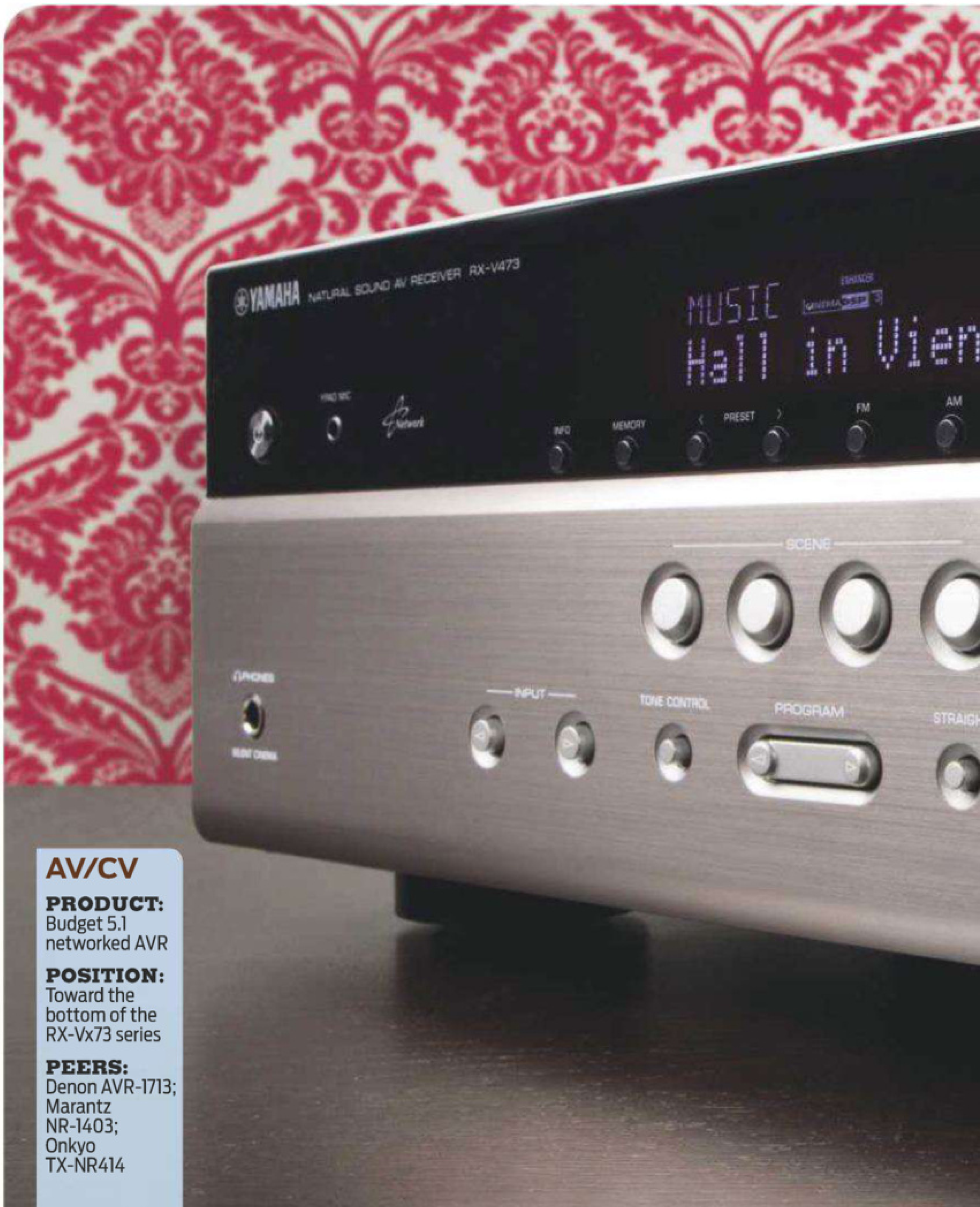
Smart control

This receiver also boasts an automatic setup system using a supplied mic, a colour GUI and remote control via iOS and Android devices using Yamaha's AV Controller App. These features were just not available on affordable amps even a couple of years back, underlining how quickly top-end features find themselves on budget kit these days.

The GUI is nothing special but the AV Controller App is very slick and is universal across Yamaha's entire range. While features like multiroom control are greyed out, as the RX-V473 doesn't have any multiroom outputs, the rest of the functionality is the same. You get control over source, volume, DSP modes and a host of minor controls such as DRC and Direct mode, giving you the full gamut of day-to day controls from any smart device.

Silver surfer: The RX-V473 brings Apple Airplay functionality to the low-end of the market

Unusually for a lot of networked hardware, AirPlay and DLNA set-up is absolutely plug and play. The



AV/CV

PRODUCT: Budget 5.1 networked AVR

POSITION: Toward the bottom of the RX-Vx73 series

PEERS: Denon AVR-1713; Marantz NR-1403; Onkyo TX-NR414

Storemags.com



receiver recognised all the DLNA servers and iTunes libraries on the Stevenson network and my iPhone and iPad both registered the RX-V473 almost as soon as it was connected to the Ethernet cable. If you have something as passé as an iPod, or other USB storage devices, a front-mounted USB socket is provided. And if you can't get a network cable to your receiver, Yamaha make a dedicated YWA-10 Wi-Fi adapter. This costs around £90, however, so I'd consider looking at a basic powerline/homeplug AV kit as the more flexible alternative.

Yamaha's green marketing message of the RX-Vx73 series means this particular model has an ECO mode that runs the receiver some 20 per cent more efficiently than in standard mode. In addition it provides timed auto power-down and uses negligible power in standby mode. It's enough to make you want to hug a tree.

As the ECO mode reduces supply current I decided to prudently leave it switched off for best performance.

A word about the RX-V473's design. In it's silver finish, it is simply gorgeous. Hats off to the Yamaha style department.

Remote: Chocked with buttons, but fairly simple to use – an iOS/Android app is also available

Light touch

In the AV world, just like on blind dates, first impressions count – and the Yamaha cuts right to the chase with action movies. The RX-V473's sound is detailed and punchy with crisp dialogue. From a feisty stance it does a good impression of immersive three-dimensional audio for a budget receiver. It has a light touch and fast pace that ensures each little tinkly top-end effect is delivered cleanly. Put on the Blu-ray of *Inception* and the iconic explosion scene in the coffee shop is painted into the room as if each bit of glass is flying around. Deep, potent bass is all present and correct from the subwoofer channel, but the 473's own mid-bass is a little too tightly wrapped for its own good. During scenes where the LFE channel is silent the Yamaha's natural balance is on the lean side and feels rather lightweight.

With more detailed movies and those pushing lots of dialogue (as opposed to exploding street

>





blocks) the Yamaha's clarity comes into its own, demonstrating accurate and intelligible voices with crisp enunciation. There is no artificial depth or added LF grunt to male voices, which can be a mixed blessing. On one hand I miss the over-the-top vocal boom that Hollywood puts on most of its movie villains, while on the other hand this does make for a very natural presentation without chestiness or resonance. Interestingly, switch off Yamaha's basic YPAO EQ and the depth and resonance returns but the soundstage shrinks and becomes smaller and more intense. Which you

> 'The Yamaha has a light touch and fast pace that ensures clean delivery of tinkly top-end effects'

prefer will be a matter of your personal taste combined with room and speaker factors.

Short of ports: The stripped-down connectivity belies this AVR's budget status

Simply does it

The RX-V473, and presumably the rest of the series, is stunningly simple to use – both with the remote control or the AV Controller App. From setup to day-to-day use you are unlikely to ever need to refer to the CD-ROM instruction manual. Yes, the handset is still crammed with a plethora of buttons, but in practice you'll only need to use about six of them.

AirPlay is even simpler if you have an iPod Touch, iPhone or iPad, too. Here you can use iTunes' own Remote App to control iTunes libraries on your servers straight to the Yamaha, or simply stream from the device. Playing iTunes Match content, stored in the iCloud, using an iPad as a controller via Wi-Fi to the router and hardwired back to the AVR, I was staggered that it all came together like a well-oiled two-piece jigsaw. Moreover, choose the RX-V473 from the playback device menu on the iPad and it overrides any input source currently selected on the receiver. That might not be so useful when you are watching a movie and the kids grab your tablet.

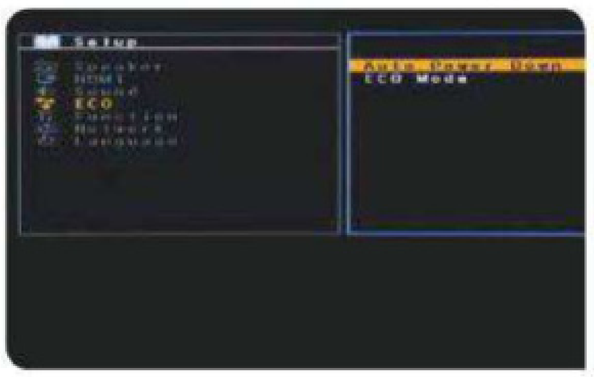
Don't expect audiophile quality from AirPlay, though. AirPlay does a decode from AAC (or MP3 depending how you have set up the library) to 44kHz PCM, then up-converts this to 48kHz before sending the stream over the local network. All this digital manipulation does nothing for sound quality. Yamaha's enhancer mode does put a little bit of impact back into the rhythm but nothing to have audiophiles jumping up and down in delight. A better option is to stream FLAC files over DLNA. Here you get high-quality music, backed with meta data for track tittles, and buffed and presented with sweet detail by the Yamaha receiver.

For those with a penchant for fatter-bottomed music, putting the Yamaha into one of its music modes, rather than source direct, enlists the help of the subwoofer.

Made for today

The RX-V473 is very much an AVR of the moment, majoring on networking content while doing 5.1 duties, too. It's certainly versatile and great value for money as an all-rounder, but for die-hard movie fans other AVRs around this price point offer more cinema grunt for your groat

→Analysis



GUI: Well, they're in colour – but otherwise the RX-V473's onscreen menus are utilitarian at best
Killer feature: This £340 AV receiver brings Apple's Airplay tech to your room with a minimum of fuss – setup and control are easy

→Specifications

Dolby TrueHD: *YES*
DTS-HD Master Audio: *YES*
THX: *NO*
Multichannel input: *NO*
Multichannel output (claimed): 5 x 80W (6 Ohms)
Multiroom: *NO* Single zone only
AV inputs: *YES* 5 x composite; 4 analogue audio; 4 x digital audio (2 x optical and 2 x coaxial); 1 x USB
HDMI: *YES* 4-in, 1-out, v1.4 (with 4K passthrough)
Video upscaling: *NO*
Component video: *YES* 2-in, 1-out
Dimensions: 435(w) x 315(d) x 161(h)mm
Weight: 8.1kg
Features: Ethernet port; optional Wi-Fi dongle; AirPlay and DLNA compatibility; ECO mode reduces power by 20 per cent; 192kHz/24-bit Burr-Brown DACs; 17 DSP modes; 4K passthrough via HDMI; ARC; AV Controller App for Android and iOS; one-touch scene setting; HDMI throughput in standby; compressed music enhancer



HCC VERDICT

Yamaha RX-V473 → £340 Approx
→ Supplier: www.yamaha.co.uk
→ Tel: 0844 811 1116

Highs: Superb networking with AirPlay and DLNA; easy to use; crisp sound; silver finish is gorgeous
Lows: Lacking in power; only four HDMI inputs; no upscaling

Performance: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

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Choices, choices...

Loewe's newest LED TV can be style-matched to suit your personal tastes and costs less than you might think. **Mark Craven** investigates

JUMP THE GUN
21 Jump Street is reborn on the bigscreen – BD review on p98

AV/CV

PRODUCT: 46in LED TV with bespoke design options

POSITION: Middle of Loewe's flatscreen lineup

PEERS: Samsung UE46ES8000; Panasonic TX-L47WT50

Earlier this year, a rumour spread that Apple was about to buy Loewe. At the time of writing it's still just a rumour, but it's easy to see how it might have started – with its new Connect ID TV, the German brand has delivered a flatscreen that has the style chops the US giant itself would be proud of.

The Connect ID is a bespoke product. Thanks to a multitude of bezel, panel and stand choices, plus the option of speccing the DR+ built-in hard drive, Loewe claims there are 2,160 different Connect ID flavours across the 32in, 40in and 46in range. Want a TV finished in lime green? Loewe can help.

The model tested here is the range-topping 46in version, and it really is a joy to behold. In a game of TV Top Trumps it would lose out to its rivals thanks to its rather chunky depth (this is not an 'ultra-thin' product), but otherwise the design is smart and classy, with an eye-catching coloured bottom strip.

Connections include a trio of HDMIs and two USB ports. An Ethernet jack is provided as is built-in Wi-Fi. Use either of these to take a spin on Loewe's MediaNet smart TV portal – and to push recordings (should you opt for DR+) from one set to another.

Practice makes perfect

If you need reminding that Loewe does things differently from its Japanese and Korean counterparts, you don't need to look further than the Connect ID's menu system. Making adjustments to the TV's picture settings, for instance, is hindered by an initially counter-intuitive system that I guarantee will have you cycling through the wrong options and pulling your hair out. It does become easier after a while, though, and the handset, while not backlit, is straightforward to use.

In fact, this really isn't a TV for those who like to fiddle. The calibration options are limited to colour temperature, colour intensity, brightness and sharpness, and, because you can't overlay the menus on the HDMI input, any tweaks you do make can only be assessed with footage from the TV's own in-built tuner. Test discs become almost useless, unless you have a photographic memory. But I would urge owners to at least drop the Sharpness level down to zero and experiment with Film Improvement Mode, because while this helps to retain detail levels with moving content, it does introduce artefacts and an air of artificiality that some won't like hate. Your own settings can be saved to Personal Mode.

Fed with Blu-rays, the Connect ID 46 delivers a good, but not class-leading performance, with its main strengths being exquisite levels of detail and bright, punchy colours. The intricate bodywork of *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*'s mechanical cast is a feast for the eyes, as is the lush vegetation of *Avatar*'s Pandora. Black levels are high but somewhat crushed – there are rival screens that offer more in the way of shadow subtlety – and light pooling from the screen's edge LED implementation is noticeable on dark areas of the image if you're viewing off-axis.

Motion-handling is average. As previously mentioned, detail levels drop if the Connect ID is faced with panning material – this isn't actually a concern most of the time, but can be distracting on occasions.

As a 3D performer, Loewe's set isn't without its flaws. Crosstalk is evident – a young girl riding the train in *The Polar Express 3D* seemed to at one point be reading two books – and I found that Film Improvement Mode had to be reinstated with stereoscopic material to eliminate judder. Yet the images offer palpable depth and retain colour vibrancy despite the darkening effect of Loewe's Active 3D glasses.

Loewe sells an all-in-one home cinema system that makes a perfect cosmetic match to the Connect ID 46, but the TV's own speakers prove something of revelation. No doubt helped by the relatively deep bezel, they provide a weighty rich sound and noticeable stereo spread. You can adjust bass and treble levels to suit your mood.

Breath of fresh air

Overall this is a solid effort from Loewe. Its design flexibility brings a breath of fresh air to a market that's dominated by 'me-too' panels. Images, after a few essential tweaks, prove highly engrossing and the sound quality is commendable. Yet perhaps the most exciting thing about the Connect ID 46 is the £2,000 price tag. At a time when Far Eastern brands are hiking up their TV's tickets, it's good to see a premium brand like Loewe offering a designer set at a price that's a little more palatable. And with all those options available, you might find it a perfect match for your media room

Flexible: Loewe's Connect ID range offers a multitude of colour and stand options

→Analysis



GUI: The menu system takes a while to get used to, and can't be overlaid on external sources. Loewe's Assist Media app (above) for the iPad offers a more tactile experience

Killer feature: The claimed 2,160 variations is not to be sniffed at – integrating the Connect ID into your own environment should be a doddle

→Specifications

3D: *YES* Active shutter
Full HD: *YES* 1,920 x 1,080
Tuner: *YES* Freeview HD, analogue, DVB-C; DVB-S2; CI slot
Smart TV: *YES* MediaNet
Connections: 3 x HDMI; 2 x USB; 1 x Ethernet; optical digital audio; Scart (via adaptor); composite; VGA
Sound: NA
Dimensions (off stand): 1,290(w) x 770(h) x 40(d)mm
Weight (off stand): 21.8kg
Features: 2D-3D conversion; Film Improvement Mode; Image Active + processing; Loewe Assist Media App (for iPad only); bespoke colour and stand options; optional DR+ built-in HDD and 'Follow Me' push technology; media playback from USB or home network



HCC VERDICT

Loewe Connect ID 46 → From £2,000 Approx → Supplier: www.loewe.tv/uk → Tel: 0207 368 1100

Highs: Bespoke design options; classy looks; excellent sonics; sharp, bright HD images
Lows: Limited calibration options; crosstalk with 3D

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5



Taking aim at the middleman

Late last year, Epson broke the £1,000 barrier for Full HD 3D projectors. **Martin Pipe** wonders if it can be as successful higher up the price ladder

We've already been more than impressed with Epson's first wave of Full HD 3D projectors – so much so that the sub-£1,000 EH-TW5900 scooped our Projector of the Year award earlier this year. Now we're faced with the more mid-market EH-TW9000, a model that promises more of the same bigscreen 3D thrills but with improved brightness, contrast and picture tweaks. Am I excited? Oh yes.

AV/CV

PRODUCT: Full HD LCD projector with 3D and ISF certification

POSITION: Epson's top home cinema projector

PEERS: Sony VPL-HW30ES; Panasonic PT-AT5000E

This 3-chip LCD projector is stunning to look at, and that's before any video is displayed. The design is a winner in other ways, too. Although the 2.1x lens isn't motorised (there's no remote adjustment, in other words) a shutter moves into position when the projector is turned off, thereby protecting it from dust. Ample connectivity is provided – including two HDMI inputs, one for your AV receiver and one for 'guest' sources – and different modes as well as inputs have their own settings memories.

Easing initial setup are an onboard pattern-generator, thumbwheels for vertical/horizontal lens shift and concentric lens rings that adjust focus and zoom. The action of these controls is smooth, and they stay in place. Keystone correction can, if necessary, be adjusted from the projector's side-mounted controls. A correctly-focused 120in picture can be thrown from distances between 3.6m and 9.6m.

Let's get Active

Sensibly, two pairs of Active shutter 3D glasses are included – extras will cost you £70 a throw. They're triggered via infra-red rather than RF, and proved utterly reliable during my review period. Epson has,



Hook up help: A pair of HDMI inputs means other sources can be easily plumbed in

however, made provision for an external IR emitter, should shutter-switching be intermittent.

Buyers of the EH-TW9000 have the option of stepping up to the EH-TW9000W (finished in gloss white, rather than black). Here, the 'W' relates to a supplied cylindrical 'Wireless HD Link' transmitter. Its job is to take signals from an HDMI-connected source, and transmit them over a maximum distance of 10m to a receiver built into the projector. This is a brilliant concept, as it means that users are not forced to string ugly cables all over the place – apart from a power lead, of course. However, the Wireless HD Link cannot achieve the impossible – uncompressed 1080p video via short-range radio. The transmitter lossily-compresses the video, which is decoded by the projector's receiver circuitry. It's fairly transparent in use, but my recommendation would still be to use HDMI whenever possible – so saving a few quid on the EH-TW9000 probably makes sense.

Aspect ratio selection also gets a dedicated handset shortcut, while a 'user' button can be assigned to one of several 3D setup functions. Other buttons toggle through 3D modes, picture presets and Epson's 'super resolution' crispening feature, not found on the EH-TW5900. Control over RS232 is something that system integrators will appreciate; there's also a 12V trigger for motorised screens. Onscreen setup menus, also accessed via the handset, are well-designed. Make

> 'The EH-TW9000 offers an attractive design and a strong performance – well worth shortlisting'

adjustments, and the projector-generated clutter is minimised so you can judge their effects.

Naturally, the EH-TW9000 will accommodate ceiling or tabletop installation, and rear/front projection. In addition to the usual tweaks (contrast, brightness, saturation), configurable video parameters include gamma curves (one of which is user-defined), deinterlacing mode, skintone (red/green shift), overscanning (but not masking) and colour temperature presets (R/G/B offset and gain adjustments are also available). Essentially, everything a calibrator needs is here. There's also an auto-iris contrast-enhancing function that works better than many, although motor noise can be obtrusive.

Remote: Epson's backlit handset is well organised, but doesn't offer motorised lens control



Go green

If you're using the projector in a darkened room, my advice is employ its eco setting. This reduces the brightness, but extends lamp life and quietens the cooling fan into the bargain. The EH-TW9000 is, by any standards, a seriously bright projector anyway, with a 2,400 Lumen output claimed for its 230W lamp.

And brightness is just one element of the EH-TW9000's excellent picture quality. The default settings (in cinema mode) proved to be far better than expected, although a few tweaks with a calibration disc can pay dividends – especially with respect to colour rendition.

Dynamic range and contrast are all impressive – Epson claims a mind-boggling 200,000:1 contrast ratio for the EH-TW9000 compared to the EH-TW5900's 20,000:1 – although in absolute terms black levels fall short of the best available. Picture quality from 2D Blu-ray and HDTV sources is characterised by strong shadow detail, fluid movement (particularly if you call upon the Frame Interpolation function on its lowest setting) and crisp resolution of detail. Standard-def material from DVDs and off-air sources fares well, too, should you want to watch low-res material at a mammoth size. My main criticism is a practical one; it can take a while for pictures to appear after switching between inputs.

But what about 3D? Epson has attempted to address LCD's shortcomings relative to DLP by ramping up the refresh rate to 480Hz for 3D content (240Hz for 2D). This should, in theory, keep crosstalk effect at bay. For the most part, Epson's efforts are successful and 3D content can be compelling and largely fatigue-free. Whatever its limitations as a movie, the mine-railway sequence of *Journey to the Centre of the Earth 3D* is a CGI joy; the spatial positioning of the prehistoric birds that fly in and out of other scenes is easily defined.

All of which points to my high opinion of this projector. If you're after a mid-range unit, the EH-TW9000 is worth shortlisting. It's not without its flaws, but they're considerably outweighed by the advantages on offer – namely attractive design, strong performance and ease of use

→Analysis

GUI: The text-heavy onscreen setup menus handle everything from basic picture tweaks to in-depth calibration, with a dash of occasional colour
Killer feature: With some brands' projectors sporting designs that are best described as functional, Epson's sleekly-styled unit is a breath of fresh air – you'll want to show it off

→Specifications

3D: *YES* Active
Full HD: *YES* 1,920 x 1,080
Connections: 2 x HDMI v1.4; 1 x component; 1 x composite; 1 x D-Sub PC input; 1 x Ethernet; 1 x RS-232; 1 x 12V trigger
Brightness (claimed): 2,400 ANSI Lumens
Contrast (claimed): 200,000:1
Dimensions: 466(w) x 140(h) x 395(d)mm
Weight: 8.5kg
Features: ISF-certified; 3 x 0.74in polysilicon active-matrix C2-Fine LCD panels; 230W lamp with life of up to 5,000 hours, 2.1x zoom lens; vertical/horizontal lens shift; test pattern generator (inc R, G and B-only modes for calibration); two pairs of 3D glasses supplied; THX-certified colour modes for 3D and 2D; RGB/CMY colour adjustment; frame interpolation mode, Super-Resolution; provision for external 3D IR transmitter



HCC VERDICT

Epson EH-TW9000 → £2,600 Approx
→ Supplier: www.epson.co.uk
→ Tel: 0871 4237766

Highs: Superb designed; easy to drive; strong overall performance; wireless HD option available
Lows: Takes time to switch between inputs; black levels not best-in-class

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Age of AV austerity

It may not offer high-fidelity, but this all-inclusive 5.1 Smart Blu-ray system from LG is great value, says **Steve May**



Bargain bundle: LG's system features 3D Blu-ray, media streaming and Smart TV

A full 5.1 home theatre system with integrated 3D Blu-ray player for just 350 notes? LG's BH6620S all-in-one seems so cheap it verges on an impulse purchase, the AV equivalent of supermarket value beans. Given that there are 2.1 systems which don't include a disc-spinner selling for more, just what can you expect from such a cut-price cinema solution?

Certainly not good looks. The BH6620S is unapologetically grim. While LG continues to raise the bar in TV design, its audio and Blu-ray divisions appear to be outsourcing to a disposable plastic cup factory. The speaker enclosures are rudimentary and the Blu-ray receiver an unprepossessing slab.

Once wired up, an onscreen channel check ensures you haven't cross-fed anything; there's no clever room calibration system. The HDMI default was 576p, which needed to be increased, but that was about it for the initial setup.

The BH6620S is built upon the bones of a fairly decent LG BD deck, and benefits from the same online content access and media streaming. This means you're given entry to a wide selection of VOD services, copious apps and terrific file support across a LAN and via USB.

LG rates the total power output of this setup at an unqualified 850W. Presumably this number has been identified by a focus group as some sort of numerical trigger for salivation. It bears little resemblance to sonic reality. The actual output of the digital amp module, shoehorned between Blu-ray disc mechanism and associated circuitry, has modest muscle, as evidenced by the current it draws from the mains. To call its bluff, I ran Metallica *(The Big Four Live in Sofia*, Blu-ray) at full volume. Shocked into life, the system sucked a peak 65W from the socket. In a normal living room, this can be considered pretty loud and not entirely pleasant. T'was as if Lars Ulrich had descended to destroy the small enclosures in person.

The passive, wired subwoofer is best kept close to the main L/C/R soundstage as it's very directional, and doesn't go particularly deep. Still, in the context of a value system, the whole array isn't bad at all. There may be no real depth or slam, but you do benefit from a coherent surround sub/sat soundstage. As the afterburners kick in for the opening landing on Pandora in *Avatar* there's a decent rumble, and subsequent surround effects are cleanly picked out. Tonally, the BH6620S is mainly about the mid-range. Dialogue has body and music enjoys a certain thump. There are a variety of preset audio modes (Natural, Bypass, Bass Blast, User EQ), which can be selected from the remote, depending on taste.

As a cheap alternative to a separates-based home cinema, LG's BH6620S can be considered good value. It would be a sensible choice for smaller rooms or as a secondary system. For the money you can't really go wrong

AV/CV

PRODUCT: 5.1 3D Blu-ray home theatre in a box

POSITION: Below the floorstanding packages in LG's lineup

PEERS: Panasonic SC-BTT270; Sony BDV-E190

→ Specifications



3D: *YES*
Upscaling: *YES* to 1080p
Smart TV: *YES* LG Smart TV
Connections: 1 x HDMI output; 1 x composite output; 1 x Ethernet; 1 x USB; 1 x analogue stereo input; 1 x optical audio input
SACD/DVD-A playback: *NO/NO*
DTS-HD/Dolby TrueHD decoding: *YES/YES*
Total amplification (claimed): 850W
Dimensions (main unit): 360(w) x 60(h) x 297(d)mm
Weight (main unit): 2.7kg
Features: DSP audio modes; USB media reader; DLNA support including FLAC; AV Sync Delay; FM radio; control app for iOS and Android; external HDD playback

HCC VERDICT

LG BH6620S → £350 Approx
→ Supplier: www.lg.com/uk
→ Tel: 0844 847 5454

Highs: Decent budget Blu-ray playback; good 'net-connected portal; excellent file compatibility
Lows: Unsophisticated subwoofer; modest amplification; bland looks

Performance: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Design: 1 **2** 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

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The Keene IR Anywhere family of products give you easy internet control of any Infra Red or RS232 products. There are many ways to use them, for example;

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Diminutive diva

Adam Rayner has a play with one of REL's smaller subwoofers and finds the UK bass brand can still impress even at this size



Black box: Hardly the most inspired design, but unobtrusive

The last REL subwoofer I reviewed was the brand's mightiest – the flagship G1, which offers bass practically down to infrasonics at stupefying levels. The T5 auditioned here is a different proposition, retailing for £450 rather than £3,000. Yet it's still equally impressive in its own way – an excellent subwoofer, very much a chip off the old block, and quietly equipped with classy technology.

The T5 parks a proprietary downward-firing 8in driver within a sealed box and sits above the floor on its own feet. The design is resolutely black, with just a brushed metal badge spoiling the top surface.

The amp is an A/B design rather than the Class D offerings found in most rivals (and REL's own more affordable T-Zero), and is able to serve up a sweet and potent sound from a relatively low power – in this case 'just' 125W. Yet I think the control and connection options are the really clever bit. With the T5, you can use the speaker-level input and the .1 feed from your AVR at the same time, with definable levels. The benefit is that movies are typically mixed for large front speakers, and plenty of bass is not routed to the LFE channel at all when mastered to domestic disc – unless you take a signal from the speaker feed and use it simultaneously. Only a few brands do this and the difference is palpable. A 10m Neutrik SpeakON cable is provided for this kind of setup.

As ever, I called upon a slice of top-quality CGI fare to test the REL's mettle – *Puss In Boots* on Blu-ray. For an affordable woofer, the performance was astonishing, offering grip and depth and, even in my suburban through-lounge, actual room pressurisation! There was a limit to the amount – two in tandem would work better – but it was still a welcome occurrence.

DreamWorks' toon is packed with delicious bass moments, from the outlaws Jack & Jill arriving at an inn and shooting a punter so a room becomes available, to a huge goose shaking the earth like a T-Rex – complete with a water-moving-in-a-puddle parody shot. The T5 ate them all, underpinning my floorstanders without a care in the world.

I was equally impressed by the woofer's internal control, which means that no matter how stupidly you may try to overdrive the unit, it'll only go up to its top ability and refuses to squawk, preferring to rein back until sanity returns and you get rich, large bass throughout.

Fierce competition

While the G1 has few competitors, the T5 sits in a fierce section of the subwoofer market, with rivals such as KEF's Kube 2 offering more in the way of design flair and power. Yet the T5's setup flexibility and welcome self-control make it very easy to recommend. A bit like the G1, in fact

AV/CV

PRODUCT: 8in, 125W subwoofer with simultaneous LFE and speaker-level inputs

POSITION: One up from the T-Zero

PEERS: KEF Kube 2; Bowers & Wilkins ASW 608; Monitor Audio Bronze BXW-10

→ Specifications

Drive unit: 1 x proprietary 8in massive excursion downward-firing woofer
Enclosure: Sealed
Frequency response: -6dB at 32Hz
Onboard power: 125W Class A/B
Remote control: NO
Dimensions: 267(w) x 299(h) x 299(d)mm
Weight: 11.7kg
Connections: Single phono for LFE input; single phono for low-level input; Neutrik SpeakON socket for high-level input

HCC VERDICT

REL T5 → £450 Approx
→ Supplier: www.rel.net
→ Tel: 01656 768 777

Highs: Small, compact and potent; good self-control; simultaneous connections
Lows: Size limits the level of room pressurisation it can achieve

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

TWONKY BEAM → £Free → www.twonky.com

Beam me up Twonky

Adrian Justins downloads a free app that lets him blow up his video

Imagine the scenario: you're sat in front of the telly browsing YouTube on your iPad and come across an HD clip of a hamster on a surf board. You want to show it to the kids who are watching EastEnders on the family flatscreen. With Twonky Beam installed on your tablet you simply press the onscreen Beam button and your TV automatically gives Janine and Ricky the boot. Twonky Beam is a free app from Packet Video that lets you throw video, music and photos from an Android or iOS device to a networked TV or any other connected media player.

Pros

- The Beam app is easy to install and navigate. Once installed it acts as a browser with additional controls for selecting connected devices (which automatically appear), switching beaming on and off, and for compiling playlists.



- It's obvious what content is beamable and what isn't as compatible clips are overlaid with a Beam icon. You can build a playlist without interrupting playback of a selected clip.
- The browser's home page has tappable icons for a range of sites offering beamable videos including YouTube, Vimeo, DailyMotion, ESPN and the Discovery Channel.

Link up: Twonky Beam throws content from your tablet to your television

Cons

- The list of compatible sites is US-centric and some listed sites don't actually have any beamable content – eg. BBC.co.uk. And Flash video files can't be beamed, which makes iPlayer incompatible.
- Despite on the fly re-encoding, compatibility issues exist. For example, our Samsung 46ES7000 couldn't show JPEGs taken on an HTC Sense phone.
- The system isn't that robust and can crash inexplicably. A Reuters news clip was suddenly followed by a random guitar vid and couldn't be stopped even by turning the smartphone off.

HCC VERDICT

Twonky Beam
£Free

Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

SONY RDP-XA900iP → £500 Approx → www.sony.co.uk

Attack of the Pod people

Mark Craven auditions a heavyweight docking system

The humble iPod dock is now dead. Instead, we're offered multi-talented products that do so much more than just pull MP3s off your handheld device and squawk them out. Sony's £500 RDP-XA900iP is a case in point – described as a 'personal audio docking system', it offers iPod/iPhone/iPad docking as well as AirPlay streaming and Bluetooth for those who don't live in an Apple-dominated universe. And it does this with considerable vigour.

Pros

- Sony has hit design gold with the RDP-XA900iP. The round-edged cabinet and metallic trim give it an air of luxury that competes with the B&W Zeppelin Air. It's quite heavy, but that bodes well for build quality.
- The sound quality from the quintet of internal drivers is good, with a spacious airy feel to tracks and a full-bodied character. It's very listenable – and goes as loud as it'll ever be required to.
- Digital and analogue audio inputs are provided for connecting legacy sources. And when connected to the 'net, an indicator light lets owners know when software updates have been made available.
- It's easy to drive. Bluetooth pairing took seconds and the supplied handset covers all key functions.

Cons

- That £500 price tag will make some of you wince.
- The RDP-XA900iP turns its nose up at old-school features like integrated FM radio or clock display.
- At 60cm wide, it might be hard to accommodate in some rooms.



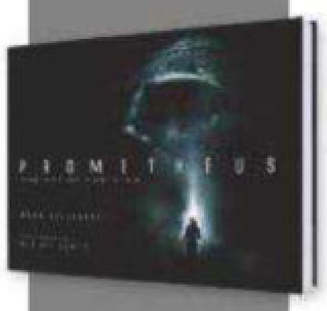
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Sony RDP-XA900iP
£500 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

In Brief

Prometheus: The Art of the Film
Titan Books
£25 Approx



Ridley Scott's long-awaited return to sci-fi might have divided critics over its story, but in design terms it was a real triumph. This sumptuous hardback tome celebrates this with swathes of pre-production art and stills, alongside commentary from Scott and the designers

1 2 3 **4** 5

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Airplay
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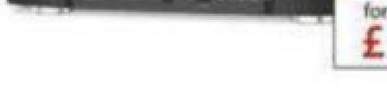
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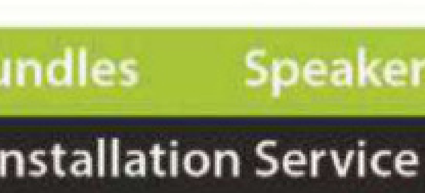


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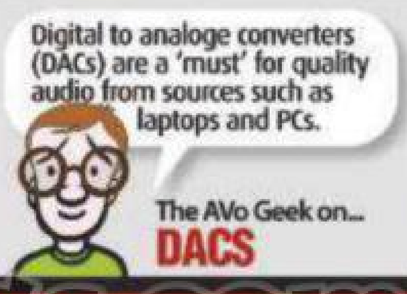


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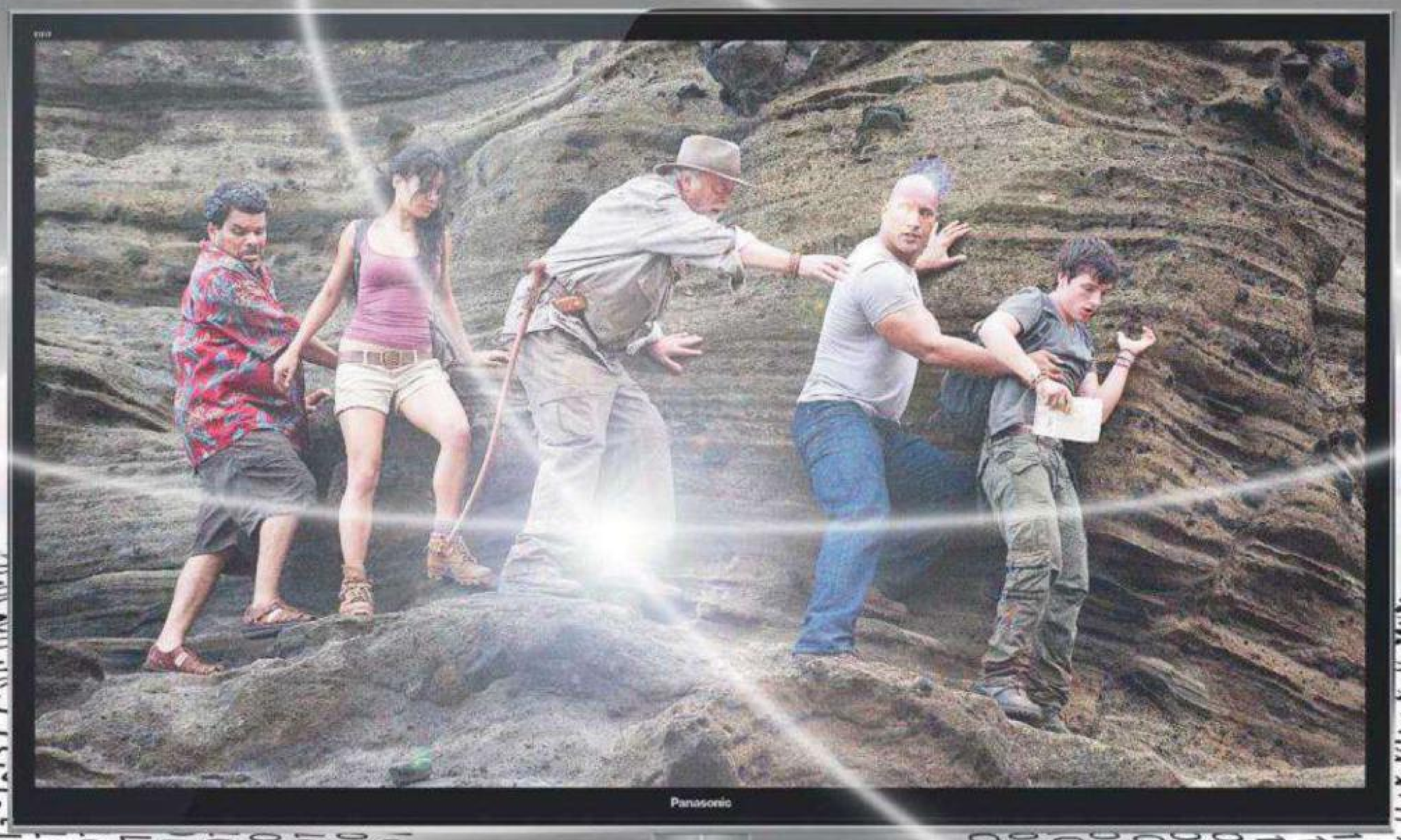
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MONSTER SPECIAL

10 of the best bigscreen TVs

On a mission to find truly cinematic thrills, **John Archer** rounds up a horde of 50in+ flatscreens



Blu-rays look their best on monster-sized displays, and in today's market there are plenty of largescreen TVs to choose from. But should you opt for plasma or LED? Passive or Active 3D? High-end or mid-range? Turn the page to find out...

LG 55LM660T
PANASONIC TX-P50ST50
PANASONIC TX-P55VT50
PHILIPS 50PFL7956
SAMSUNG PS51E8000
SAMSUNG UE55ES8000
SHARP LC-60LE636E
SONY KDL-55HX853
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Mid-range model majors on style

LG's 55in LED offering mixes sumptuous design, impressive 3D images and a decent price tag

For possibly the first time ever, LG has TVs in its range that are prettier than those of its great Korean rival, Samsung. And the 55in 55LM660T is one of them, looking nothing short of spectacular thanks to its unfeasibly thin bezel.

The aesthetics are just the start of the mid-range 55LM660T's attractions, though. For instance, it's got 3D playback courtesy of LG's proprietary Passive 3D technology. Also tucked within the set's svelte frame is the brand's online service, which now combines vast quantities of content with a much-improved interface. You can adjust just about every aspect of the TV's picture settings, too, and it's arguably the most comprehensive screen around when it comes to being able to handle multimedia files from a networked PC.

LG has been rather inconsistent with picture quality across its range this year, but the 55LM660T is one of the better performers. The Passive 3D system, for starters, allows you (and your family given that you get four pairs of glasses for free) to enjoy impressively bright, colourful, crosstalk-free 3D images that don't becoming tiring over lengthy sessions.

With 2D, meanwhile, the 55LM660T produces a fetching combination of bold colours and very healthy black levels, along with more finesse when it comes to both colour blends, and detailing during dark scenes, than previous LG mid-rangers have managed. HD footage is extremely sharp, and LG's SD upscaling seems to have improved considerably from last year. There are traces of backlight inconsistency right at the screen's edges, though, and the set loses more resolution over moving objects than many of its rivals here. These flaws leave it short of the best performers, but if you like its design and fancy Passive rather than Active 3D, it's hard to imagine you'll be disappointed.

→ Specifications

3D: YES Passive
Full HD: YES 1,920 x 1,080
Tuner: YES Freeview HD
Connections: 4 x v1.4 HDMI; 1 x component video; 1 x composite video; 3 x USB; 1 x LAN; Scart; stereo analogue audio input; D-Sub PC input; optical digital audio output
Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness: 450cd/m2
Contrast ratio: N/A
Dimensions (off stand): 1,232(w) x 723(h) x 33.1(d)mm
Weight: 21.3kg
Features: LG Smart TV service; DLNA and USB multimedia playback; Triple XD Engine processing; local dimming; 400Hz MCI; built-in Wi-Fi



Cinematic screen for the cash-conscious

Panasonic's mid-range plasma offers a surprising amount of bang for your buck

The 50in P50ST50 sits in the middle of Panasonic's plasma range, and is the cheapest point at which you can sample the brand's latest NeoPlasma panels. These use increased energy efficiencies to deliver brighter pictures without falling foul of the EU's stringent energy regulations.

The P50ST50 is passably attractive by plasma standards, though it lacks the glamour of the latest 'bezel-free' edge LED TVs from Samsung, LG and even Panasonic itself.

Key features include Active 3D playback (though no glasses are included), access to Panasonic's Viera Connect online platform, and multimedia file playback via USB or networked computer. The brand's onscreen menus and remote control are starting to look rather dated by 2012 standards, but the P50ST50 isn't actually hard to use.

With plasma's commercial fortunes apparently continuing to decline, it's great to see that Panasonic hasn't been tempted to compromise the P50ST50's performance. On the contrary, it delivers a significant leap forward from last year's models. Particularly impressive are its black levels, which are so rich and deep they finally challenge Pioneer's legendary Kuro models, and trounce the black level efforts of the best LCD TVs. Dark sequences thus look richer, more believable and more detailed than they do on any LCD rival.

The improved brightness benefits 3D viewing in particular. Motion is clean and sharp, too, and colours are warm and natural, although lacking the same punch of most LCD sets.

Other problems are the unexpected appearance of crosstalk while watching 3D, some colour lag over moving skin tones, and pictures looking a bit dull if watched in very bright rooms. But as a serious movie machine the P50ST50 is pretty much peerless for its price.

→ Specifications

3D: YES Active
Full HD: YES 1,920 x 1,080
Tuner: YES Freeview HD
Connections: 3 x v1.4 HDMI; 1 x component video; 1 x composite video; 2 x USB; 1 x LAN; Scart; stereo analogue audio input; D-Sub PC input
Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness: N/A
Contrast ratio: 5,500,000:1
Dimensions (off stand): 1,180(w) x 709(h) x 50(d)mm
Weight: 23kg
Features: Viera Connect online service; multimedia playback from USB; NeoPlasma panel design; 2,000Hz focused field drive; DLNA support; built-in Wi-Fi



All hail the Prince of plasmas

If you're serious about watching movies, then Panasonic's 55in flagship should be on your list

Given how much we've enjoyed Panasonic's P50ST50, you can probably guess what we think of the step-up 55in VT series model. We love it.

For starters, the extra 5in of panel makes a surprising amount of difference, turning the screen from a mere 'TV' into a true home cinema machine.

Then there's the P55VT50's extra features. Particularly important is the enhanced filter in its screen, which delivers even richer black levels than the P50ST50. Also of note is a shift up to 2,500Hz subfield driving from the P50ST50's 2,000Hz, a welcome fourth HDMI input, and the P55VT50's dual-core processor, which permits extremely handy multi-tasking (multiple apps open at once) when using the TV's multimedia services.

Even when asked to handle phenomenally tough movie sequences like chapter 12 of the final Harry Potter film, with its exceptionally dark, grainy and subtly coloured sequences, the P55VT50's performance can only be described as imperious. Its black levels, for instance, are the deepest I've ever seen, but with an incredible amount of shadow detail on show in even the darkest image corners.

Colours look rich, polished and natural, and detail levels are stunning – especially as there's no motion blur to worry about.

The exceptional performance level holds up when watching 3D (via the two included pairs of glasses). The crosstalk noted with the P50ST50 is largely eradicated, and detail and depth reproduction are high. The only negative is that 3D images still lack brightness compared to the LCD competition.

Actually, pictures generally aren't aggressively bright. But treat this set with the respect it deserves by dimming your lights and it will reward you with one of the finest home cinema performances money can currently buy.

→ Specifications

3D: YES Active
Full HD: YES 1,920 x 1,080
Tuner: YES Freeview HD
Connections: 4 x v1.4 HDMI; 1 x component video; 1 x composite video; 2 x USB; 1 x LAN; Scart; stereo analogue audio input; D-Sub PC input
Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness: N/A
Contrast ratio: 6,000,000:1
Dimensions (off stand): 1,286(w) x 771(h) x 50(d)mm
Weight: 31.5kg
Features: Viera Connect online service; multimedia playback from USB; 2,500Hz focused field drive; DLNA support; built-in Wi-Fi; Infinite Black Ultra panel design



Goodbye to those irritating black bars

Philips' 21:9 ratio LED TV may stick out like a sore thumb, but works its magic with the right material

And now for something completely different. For while just about every other widescreen TV in the world sports a 16:9 aspect ratio, this Philips oddity employs a much wider 21:9 aspect design.

There's definitely method to this apparent madness, though, with most films released into cinemas using the 21:9 ratio rather than 16:9. So actually the 50PFL7956's extra width is a statement of how much it loves movies. What's more, it backs its intriguing shape up with Passive 3D playback, and Philips' mid-level Pixel Precise HD picture processing system.

Rummaging through my movie collection for 21:9-ratio Blu-rays (and ending up with *Casino Royale* and *Alien*), the impact of the extra screen width is immediate and emphatic. Basically, it just looks right, allowing images to fill your field of vision better, and making you realise just how distracting those black bars you normally have to bear really are.

In addition, 2D HD pictures look extremely detailed, colours are bold but natural, and the image's contrast is good – albeit not up there with some of the best rivals today.

The set's 3D images are fine, too. The screen width is even more effective with 3D, and because it's Passive 3D, there's no trouble with crosstalk noise or brightness reduction. Detail levels aren't as high as you get with Active 3D sets and there's minor line structure in some bright 3D pictures, but overall it's a great effort.

Aside from the middling contrast performance, this screen's other flaw is that, while its 21:9 shape works great for some material, it requires rescaling of 16:9 ratio films, which might offend purists. Furthermore, since no film studios currently master Blu-rays in a true 21:9 ratio – instead inserting the black bars into the actual image at source – the 50PFL7956 has to 'blow up' even those flicks to make them fill its screen properly.

→ Specifications

3D: YES Passive
Full HD: YES 2,560 x 1,080
Tuner: YES Freeview HD
Connections: 4 x v1.4 HDMI; 1 x component video input; 1 x composite video input; two USB inputs; 1 x LAN; Scart; stereo analogue audio input, D-Sub PC input
Sound: 2 x 17W
Brightness: 450cd/m2
Contrast ratio: 500,000:1
Dimensions (off stand): 1,242(w) x 580(h) x 32(d)mm
Weight: 22kg
Features: 21:9 ratio screen; Ambilight; Pixel Precise HD processing; NetTV online system; dual-screen gaming support



Samsung display does Active 3D to a T

The Korean giant makes plasmas, too! Not that you'd forgotten or anything...

While Samsung's main focus is clearly on its market-leading LED TVs, it hasn't given up on plasma technology yet, and the 51in PS51E8000 is one of its flagship models.

By Samsung's 'haut couture' standards the PS51E8000 isn't a particularly glamorous TV, with a fairly chunky bezel and a curious grey finish, but it catches the eye when it comes to its features and interface. As well as the regular handset, you get a second touchpad remote, and you can control the TV via either voice commands or gesture controls. The latter system feels a little primitive at the moment, but Samsung deserves kudos for at least trying to make handling the complexities of Smart TV easier. If you want to show off to your friends, this feature will definitely help.

Put it into action with 2D material and the PS51E8000 gives a solid account of itself. It doesn't improve greatly on last year's Samsung models, but it still enjoys some reasonably deep black levels, punchy colours, a high level of brightness by plasma standards, crisp motion reproduction and eye-watering detail levels.

It's also in some ways a terrific 3D performer, serving up brighter pictures than plasma technology usually manages, along with hardly any crosstalk noise. The only times I saw any of the double ghosting flaw was during the famously tricky lanterns-at-night sequence on the *Tangled 3D* Blu-ray.

The PS51E8000's 3D playback does suffer, though, from some fairly pronounced judder when showing motion.

By far the biggest problem for Samsung's set is that for all its feature and interface excellence, in pure picture terms it falls short of Panasonic's 2012 plasma models, especially in the black level department. But that doesn't mean the PS51E8000 isn't worthy of an audition.

→ Specifications

3D: *YES* Active
Full HD: *YES* 1,920 x 1,080
Tuner: *YES* Freeview HD
Connections: 3 x v1.4 HDMI; 1 x component video; 1 x composite video, 3 x USB, 1 x LAN; Scart; stereo analogue audio input; D-Sub PC input; optical digital audio output
Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness: N/A
Contrast ratio: N/A
Dimensions (off stand): 1,193(w) x 713(h) x 48.1(d)mm
Weight: 21.3kg
Features: Smart TV functionality with Family, Fitness and Kid zones; 2 x 3D glasses included; second touchpad remote; Wi-Fi



Meet the TV that's Smarter than Einstein

Samsung practically invented the concept of Smart TV – and this 55in LED is its cleverest yet

We've said that Samsung is keener on its LED TVs, so here's the one it loves the most – the range-topping UE55ES8000.

This 55in TV offers killer looks thanks to the way only the narrowest of metallic frames wraps around its huge screen. Also, since it's from the flagship 8000 series, it boasts all the startling features noted with the PS51E8000 plasma, such as a gorgeously presented and extremely well-stocked online service, Active 3D playback (with two pairs of glasses included), second remote control with a touchpad, and support for gesture controls and voice recognition.

Out of the box, the first thing you have to do is tone down the over-wrought presets Samsung still insists on using on its TVs. And with the backlight level, in particular, pushed way down from its default level, this monster screen proves to be very capable indeed.

The trusty Voldemort army attack sequence in the final Harry Potter, for instance, reveals the UE55ES8000 to be capable of excellent black levels by LED standards. There's also only the subtlest trace of the backlight consistency flaws that often blight large edge LED TVs.

Colours, meanwhile, look downright spectacular on the UE55ES8000, and its HD detailing is almost forensically accurate. For sheer spectacle there's not much out there that can top this Samsung flagship.

These inherently aggressive pictures serve the TV well in combating the brightness reduction introduced by the Active shutter 3D glasses. Stereoscopic pictures also look brilliantly detailed, and crosstalk is only a minor distraction.

The wider viewing angle and more detailed dark scenes delivered by Panasonic's plasmas arguably make them better die-hard movie machines – but as an all-round lifestyle choice, the UE55ES8000 is hard to resist. This is an astonishing achievement.

→ Specifications

3D: *YES* Active
Full HD: *YES* 1,920 x 1,080
Tuner: *YES* Freeview HD
Connections: 3 x v1.4 HDMI; 1 x component video; 1 x composite video; 3 x USB; 1 x LAN; Scart; stereo analogue audio input; D-Sub PC input; optical digital audio output
Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness: N/A
Contrast ratio: N/A
Dimensions (off stand): 1,230.3(w) x 722.3(h) x 30.8(d)mm
Weight: 16.6kg
Features: Smart TV functionality with Family, Fitness and Kid zones; 2 x 3D glasses included; second touchpad remote; Wi-Fi

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Bargain-priced behemoth

Sharp rewrites the bigscreen rulebook with a 60in TV toting a paltry £1,200 price tag

I'm almost genetically predisposed to love Sharp's 60LE636E. After all, it's a truly massive 60in LED TV that can be yours for around £1,200. Bonkers.

The glorious screen size/price balance is backed up, moreover, by some elegant looks for such a huge telly. Please note, though, that the design's appeal isn't its slimness. If you judge a TV by it butts size, this isn't for you.

The 60LE636E's price comes with a couple of feature strings attached. For starters, it doesn't support 3D. It also doesn't benefit from Sharp's quad-pixel Quattron technology. However, it does carry 100Hz processing, and rustles up DLNA and USB multimedia playback. There's also access to Sharp's Aquos Net online service – though this is still one of the weakest Smart portals around.

For a while, my initial love affair with the 60LE636E continues with its performance. *The Woman In Black* benefits from surprisingly punchy, but also natural, colours sitting right next to deep black levels.

Motion is decent, too. Sure, there's a touch of resolution loss over moving objects, but it's seldom distracting, and I wouldn't expect anything better at this price point. HD pictures are detailed and crisp. Standard-definition footage, while obviously much rougher, is still watchable.

The 60LE636E does have one major flaw, however. When watching the dark sequences that routinely populate films like *The Woman in Black* it's easy to see, and get quite annoyed by, some large and distinctive areas of backlight inconsistency.

I'm not wholly surprised by this problem. The edge LEDs are having to 'spread' their light quite a long way, after all. But it's a shame that such a colossal TV should have its movie credentials damaged by a single flaw. Then again, you might consider the Sharp's bargain-bin price tag more than adequate compensation.

→ Specifications

3D: *NO*
Full HD: *YES* 1,920 x 1,080
Tuner: *YES* Freeview HD
Connections: 4 x v1.3 HDMI; 1 x component video; 1 x composite video; 1 x USB input; 1 x LAN; Scart; stereo analogue audio input; D-Sub PC input
Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness: N/A
Contrast ratio: N/A
Dimensions (off stand): 1,383(w) x 838h) x 72(d)mm
Weight: 32.6kg
Features: AquosNet online system; USB and DLNA multimedia playback; 100Hz processing; built-in Wi-Fi; USB time-shifting

SONY KDL-55HX853 → £1,800 Approx



Sony's LED is pure poetry in motion

This Bravia offers a classy package of sleek looks, excellent contrast and detailed, smooth images

Sony's new 55HX853 is nothing short of sensational.

Design-wise, it's the brand's best-looking TV for ages, with its sheer glass front, black bezel and silvery outer trim all harmonising beautifully with the leanback stand.

Multimedia talents are extensive, too, permitting playback of video, photo or music files from USB storage drives or networked PCs or Macs (with the help of Sony's Homestream software), and giving you access to Sony's SEN online system, with its swanky new interface and oodles of video content.

The 55HX853's biggest attraction, though, is its picture quality, which is probably the best on offer in the LED world.

Here's why: this set delivers the finest black level performance I've witnessed from an edge LED TV without compromising either shadow detailing or general brightness levels to any serious extent. Helping to achieve this is a local dimming system that manages to dim and boost the brightness levels of different parts of the screen while hardly ever creating light 'blocking' around bright objects. Awesome.

The 55HX853 also serves up natural and nuanced colours and detailed HD images – especially as Sony's set excels with motion reproduction, pretty much removing any trace of blur and judder.

Furthermore, the 55HX853's X-Reality processing makes it a revelation with both standard-definition and 3D content, allowing both formats to appear with exceptional levels of sharpness and noise-free clarity.

There is minor crosstalk with stereoscopic material, and I guess some people might find the 55HX853's overall picture presentation fractionally muted if their viewing room is extremely bright. But these issues only detract a tiny fraction from what is a spectacular return to form for the big S.

→ Specifications

3D: *YES* Active
Full HD: *YES* 1,920 x 1,080
Tuner: *YES* Freeview HD
Connections: 4 x v1.4 HDMI; 1 x component video; 1 x composite video; 2 x USB; 1 x LAN; Scart; stereo analogue audio input; D-Sub PC input; optical digital audio output
Sound: 3 x 10W
Brightness: 450cd/m2
Contrast ratio: 1,000,000:1
Dimensions (off stand): 1,274(w) x 750(h) x 35(d)mm
Weight: 21.7kg
Features: SEN online; DLNA and USB multimedia playback; X-Reality Pro Engine; local dimming system; built-in Wi-Fi; leanback stand



CEVO-powered and with lashings of style

Powerful picture processing helps this designer set deliver high-quality HD images

Although Toshiba's 55WL863 isn't as brain-bendingly cutting-edge as the brand's 55ZL2, it's still a premium TV. The comely design wrapped around its 55in screen is courtesy of the Jacob Jensen Design Studio, and it sports Toshiba's CEVO Engine – a powerful processing system that might not go as far as the Japanese CEVO sets but still has the muscle to boost picture quality and features.

CEVO Engine tricks include advanced upscaling of not only standard-def but also internet sources; a clever autocalibration system via Toshiba's optional TPA-1 colour meter; and enhanced control of the set's edge LED lighting system to deliver supposedly better colours, contrast and brightness.

The 55WL863 carries Active 3D playback and Toshiba's Places online service, which mixes an appealing interface with a disappointingly low level of content.

In many ways the 55WL863's pictures are strong. In 2D mode it oozes the sort of detail and colour reproduction subtlety that separates the high-end TV men from the cheapo boys. Pictures are bright and dynamic, yet this brightness doesn't stop the set producing a reasonably convincing contrast range. Dark scenes are not badly troubled by backlight consistency flaws, either.

Motion is adequately handled, though the TV's motion processing causes some slightly odd twitching at times, especially during camera pans. 3D movies are impressive to the extent that they look bright for Active 3D and enjoy strong levels of detail. But the 55WL863 proves susceptible to crosstalk ghosting – especially if you're watching a side-by-side 3D source like Sky's 3D channel.

The 55WL863 is a classy TV overall – but it also feels as if it's been overtaken in recent times by some impressive new competitors.

→ Specifications

3D: *YES* Active
Full HD: *YES* 1,920 x 1,080
Tuner: *YES* Freeview HD
Connections: 4 x v1.4 HDMI; 1 x component video; 1 x composite video; 2 x USB inputs; 1 x LAN; Scart; stereo analogue audio input; D-Sub PC input; digital audio output, subwoofer output
Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness: 450cd/m2
Contrast ratio: 7,000,000:1
Dimensions (off stand): 1,265(w) x 844(h) x 49(d)mm
Weight: 21kg
Features: Toshiba Places online system; DLNA and USB multimedia playback; CEVO Engine; built-in Wi-Fi



Are you ready for the future of TV?

Give your Blu-ray collection a 4K makeover with Toshiba's groundbreaking 55ZL2

At seven grand, Toshiba's 55ZL2 is easily the most expensive TV we're looking at here. But it does a surprisingly thorough job of justifying its eye-watering price.

Firstly, it's the first UK TV to deliver glasses-free 3D, via an absurdly clever mix of lenticular lenses, a built-in camera to track viewers' head positions, and massive processing power. More excitingly, it's the first TV to reach these shores with a '4K' pixel resolution of 3,840 x 2,160.

Well-designed and logical onscreen menus make the 55ZL2 easy to use despite its cutting-edge nature. Other features on offer include expansive picture calibration aids, and even an autocalibration system via Toshiba's optional TPA-1 colour meter.

Not surprisingly, the 55ZL2 is at its best when fed a native 4K feed from one of Toshiba's specially designed video servers. The detailing, subtlety, colour accuracy, purity and clarity of its true 4K source reproduction needs to be seen to be believed.

But given the lack of native 4K sources, it crucial that the 55ZL2 does a good job of upscaling HD to its 4K panel – though the slightly softer, noisier images are no match for the real deal.

The real problem is that this TV will only play 4K from Toshiba's dedicated, marketing-purposes-only servers via a specific digital port. Unlike Sony's VPL-VW1000ES projector, it can't accept 4K from other sources via its HDMI inputs. So essentially those who buy it will *never* be able to play true 4K material. Grrr.

As for the 55ZL2's glasses-free 3D images, they're best described as an intriguing experiment. They look rather soft, suffer signs of visible filter structure, and lose focus unless you keep your head aggravatingly still. But the 3D effect really works, doesn't feel tiring and is a genuine glimpse of the future.

→ Specifications

3D: *YES* glasses-free
Full HD: *YES* 3,840 x 2,160
Tuner: *YES* Freeview HD and satellite (not Freesat)
Connections: 4 x v1.4 HDMI; 1 x component video; 1 x composite video; USB input; 1 x LAN; Scart; stereo analogue audio input; D-Sub PC input; subwoofer output
Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness: 450cd/m2
Contrast ratio: 9,000,000:1
Dimensions (off stand): 1,253(w) x 832(h) x 35(d)mm
Weight: 30.5kg
Features: CEVO Engine; Places online service; multimedia USB/DLNA playback; 4K upscaling; built-in Wi-Fi

Final standings

Of the ten here, it's Sharp's 60LE636E that brings up the rear. This is a shame, as we adore Sharp's policy of selling huge TVs for knock-down prices. But in the 60LE636E's case, the use of edge LED lighting on such a large display proves a mistake. In ninth comes Toshiba's 55WL863. This smartly-designed set was hot property when it first came out, but it's starting to show its age now, especially with 3D.

Eighth place is taken by Philips' 50PFL7956. We love the idea of a 21:9 TV, and the impact of seeing a CinemaScope movie on a perfectly matched TV is exhilarating, but a TV that has to rescale pretty much every source it receives won't be to everyone's taste.

Toshiba's 55ZL2 follows. Its upscaled Quad HD pictures look fantastic, but not being able to play true 4K will be a huge downer – and glasses-free 3D playback just isn't up to scratch.

Now it starts to get tough. After lengthy deliberation, we've put Samsung's PS51E8000 in sixth place. If considered alone, this is a worthy plasma TV, especially with 3D, but it has the misfortune of coming up against two superior models from Panasonic. The LG 55LM660T bags fifth, courtesy of its engaging Passive 3D playback and sumptuous design.

Tying for third are Samsung's UE55ES8000 and Panasonic's P50ST50. The Samsung has a stunning design and an innovative feature set, the Panasonic offers terrific value and cinematic black levels. So your choice here is based either on price, or whether you're want a lifestyle (Samsung) or videophile (Panasonic) TV.

In second spot is Sony's 55HX853. This is, for our money, the best LED TV yet, combining superb black levels with fluid, bright pictures. The online portal is content-rich, and at £1,800 it's excellent value. In fact, if you're looking for an all-purpose TV for your living room, this is probably it.

However, if you're after an imperious screen for an enthusiast home cinema setup, even the magnificent Sony can't quite outgun Panasonic's P55VT50. This is not only Panasonic's best plasma TV ever, but finally lays to rest the ghost of Pioneer's Kuro with its world-beating black levels

1ST



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic TX-P55VT50 → £2,400 Approx → Supplier: www.panasonic.co.uk

Highs: World-beating black levels; excellent 3D and 2D

Lows: Pictures lack brightness in light conditions

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 4 **5**

2ND



HCC VERDICT

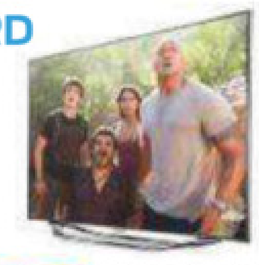
Sony KDL-55HX853 → £1,800 Approx → Supplier: www.sony.co.uk

Highs: Class-leading LED pictures; good value; VOD-rich online portal

Lows: Minor 3D crosstalk; no 3D glasses included; SEN menu is sluggish

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 3 **4** **5**
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 4 **5**

3RD



HCC VERDICT

Samsung UE55ESE8000 → £2,500 Approx → Supplier: www.samsung.co.uk

Highs: Excellent, content-rich online system; very good LED pictures

Lows: Black levels can be bettered; gesture control needs more work

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 4 **5**

3RD



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic TX-P50ST50 → £1,100 Approx → Supplier: www.panasonic.co.uk

Highs: Remarkable black level response; excellent value for money

Lows: Pictures not especially bright; minor 3D crosstalk

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 **5**

5TH



HCC VERDICT

LG 55LM660T → £1,650 Approx → Supplier: www.lg.com/uk

Highs: Endlessly watchable 3D; sensational design; good 2D pictures

Lows: Motion is slightly soft; minor backlight inconsistency

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

6TH



HCC VERDICT

Samsung PS51E8000 → £1,700 Approx → Supplier: www.samsung.co.uk

Highs: Excellent, content-rich online system; watchable pictures

Lows: Judder with 3D; black levels not best-in-class; bland design

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

7TH



HCC VERDICT

Toshiba 55ZL2 → £7,000 Approx → Supplier: www.toshiba.co.uk

Highs: Upscaled 4K impresses; excellent design; liberating glasses-free 3D

Lows: No 4K support via HDMI; blur with 3D; £7,000 price tag

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

8TH



HCC VERDICT

Philips 50PFL7956 → £1,400 Approx → Supplier: www.philips.co.uk

Highs: 21:9 shape works great with ultrawide films; relaxing 3D

Lows: 50in perhaps a bit small for a 21:9 set; all sources are scaled

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

9TH



HCC VERDICT

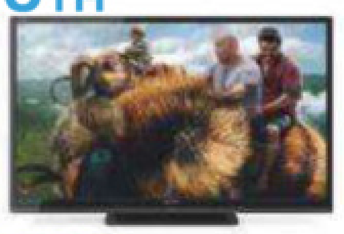
Toshiba 55WL863 → £1,650 Approx → Supplier: www.toshiba.co.uk

Highs: Powerful video processing; great operating system

Lows: Crosstalk with 3D; motion flaws; Smart portal is weak

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

10TH



HCC VERDICT

Sharp LC-60LE636E → £1,200 Approx → Supplier: www.sharp.co.uk

Highs: It's a 60in TV for £1,200; bright scenes look great

Lows: Irritating backlight inconsistency; no 3D; limited online service

Performance: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Introducing the

HOME CINEMA Choice

web app

for iPad, iPhone and Android



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and all other electronic tablets via your browser rather than from an app store.

Go to: **www.homecinemachoice.com/app**
on your device to check it out now!

Finishing touches

Adrian Justins trawls the shelves for those must-have home cinema extras

SANUS VMA401

£35 approx

Connecting a wall-mounted screen to a PVR, BD player or soundbar can look inelegant if you end up with cables trailing all over the place. And not everyone wants to tear through wallpaper or hack away plaster to hide wires. Sanus' latest mount seems like a reasonable compromise to the problem, featuring a tempered glass shelf just below the screen.

The VMA401's single column is vertically adjustable. The smoked grey shelf can handle products up to 6.5kg, which can then be plugged into sockets positioned behind the TV. Integrated cable-management keeps things tidy.

www.sanus.com

HCC VERDICT

Neat and cost effective



DVDO AIR

£350 approx

Anyone who occasionally likes to set up a projector for bigscreen movie viewing will be familiar with the irritation of trailing an HDMI cable from deck to PJ. One solution is a wireless HD transmission system such as the DVDO Air. Capable of delivering uncompressed 1080p 2D and 3D video with 7.1 surround sound, the DVDO is CEC compatible and operates at any one of six channels in the 60GHz band, well above the frequencies used by other wireless devices such as phones and Wi-Fi routers.

The range is rated up to 10m, or 30m line-of-sight should you happen to live in Buckingham Palace. The system comprises a transmitter, which connects to the source, and a receiver that simply clips on or behind a display device using the bracket supplied. Setup requires powering the system down, replacing the HDMI cable with DVDO Air, mounting the receiver, and powering up.



Of course, the transmitter and receiver do require electricity to work but power consumption is relatively low.

www.dvdo.com

HCC VERDICT

Daft name but a good idea

HARMAN KARDON BT HEADPHONES

£220 approx

Nothing to do with the UK's largest telephony provider, BT here stands for Bluetooth. Designed to complement the look of the Apple iPhone with rectangular ear cups, these cans are high-quality, plastic-free affairs with steel hinges and a sand-blasted metal finish. The outer metal band comes in two sizes for large and small bonces, while a leather inner band provides a comfortable head cushion. The ear pads 'float' in an enclosed steel frame, with only soft leather touching the ears.

The 40mm drivers have a claimed frequency response of 16Hz-20kHz, while an integrated mic allows phone calling. Built-in playback buttons sit along the side of one ear cup for easy music controls. Battery life is around 12 hours, with a backup cable provided for emergency passive use.



www.harmankardon.com

HCC VERDICT

Steve Jobs may well have approved



DFS TROPHY CUDDLER AUDIO SOFA

£1,400 approx

The days when you had to haul your butt across a room to spin an LP on the music centre are a distant memory, but even iPod docks don't match this piece of furniture in the pure convenience stakes. Featuring a built-in dock with Bluetooth connectivity, the Trophy Cuddler Audio Sofa (our favourite name for a piece of furniture yet) makes it a cinch to play your favourite pulling tunes without spoiling the moment. The two-seater sofa incorporates stereo speakers in the armrests and a subwoofer to maximise the low-frequency impact of your Barry White collection in full flow. Connectivity also includes a USB port, auxiliary 3.5mm jack and an SD card slot. All that's missing is a built-in fridge and drinks cabinet.

www.dfs.co.uk



HCC VERDICT

Takes laziness to a new level

LG SMART TV UPGRADER

£180 approx

The SP820 could be just the ticket for anyone looking to 'smarten' up their screen without forking out for a whole new TV. All you need is a spare HDMI socket and a home network. This second-generation Smart TV Upgrader has all of the connected TV features found on LG's latest screens, including BBC iPlayer, Acetrax and Viewster, plus a web browser with HTML and Flash support. It hooks up to the internet by Ethernet cable or via its built-in Wi-Fi function.

Multimedia USB playback and DLNA networking are included, with diverse file compatibility including DivX HD, H.264, WMV and anime-fave MKV. If you are a 3D nut, compatibility with 3D files is complemented by a plentiful online channel stuffed with content, but lossless audio fans may lament the lack of FLAC playback.

www.lg.com/uk

HCC VERDICT

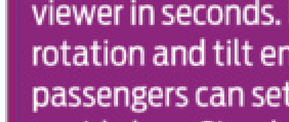
Just one Netflix app short of excellence



Clips...

Small items that could make a big difference to your system

Mophie Juice Pack Powerstation

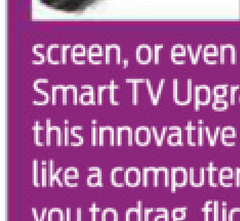


£70 approx

With a whopping 4000 mAh capacity and super-fast charging, this pocket-sized battery booster provides unrivalled reserve power for any iDevice or USB-equipped phone/tablet. Not cheap, but could prove to be a technological life-saver.
www.mophie.com

Cygnett CarGo

£30 approx



Cheaper than buying a car-compatible DVD player, Cygnett's headrest bracket turns your iPad into a kid-quietening movie-viewer in seconds. Extensive rotation and tilt ensures passengers can set it up to avoid glare. Simply add iTunes.
uk.cygnett.com

LG AN-MR300 Magic Remote



£40 approx

The perfect companion to any Smart LG screen, or even the brand's Smart TV Upgrader (see left), this innovative remote operates like a computer mouse, allowing you to drag, flick and select using a combination of a single button and your wrist action. A surprisingly intuitive solution that works well in tandem with a regular handset.
www.lg.com/uk

Seagate Backup Plus Storage



From £70 approx

Loaded with the proprietary Seagate Dashboard software for one-click local backup, this portable offering is also the world's first external hard drive to provide backup for content on social networks, such as Facebook and Flickr. It's interchangeable between Macs and PCs, and capacity ranges from 500GB to 3TB.
www.seagate.com

ADVERTISEMENT

THE TOP20

Choosing a home cinema system is a potential minefield that must be negotiated with great care or safely avoided by letting experts guide you. If you want to end up with a system that, as a minimum, meets your expectations in terms of picture and sound quality, reading magazine product reviews and choosing the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys can only ever be part of the answer at best. Looking for the cheapest price and having a system delivered to your door, even with a 'knowledgeable' friend to help set it up, is a well-trodden path to disappointment.

There is a bewildering choice of components on the market today and also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, or plasma, LCD or LED TV? 3D or non-3D? Full 1080p capability is now the only sensible choice but the appropriate source components, such as a Blu-ray player, need to be part of the equation. The sound performance of a system is also hugely important, even more so if you will be listening to music, or music DVD's, through the same system. If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Having an amp with the right inputs for the best connectivity is essential but you will also need to decide on a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub and, crucially, where they will be sited for the best results. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

ACHIEVING POTENTIAL

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer. This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that **the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level.** To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity. Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.



WHAT AND WHERE TO BUY

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ...**don't** start with **WHAT**, start with **WHERE**. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit **you**.

> "...Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience."

So good you'll believe you're there!

GUIDE

TO BUYING HOME A CINEMA SYSTEM



BUYING OR BEING SOLD TO?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a carefully selected group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

GETTING THE BEST DEAL

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a far better way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

LISTED BELOW ARE 20 OF THE BEST AV SHOPS IN THE COUNTRY

They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

SOUTH

Chelmsford RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
216 Moulsham Street. 01245 265245
www.rayleighhifi.com

Colchester NEW TECHNOLOGY UNLIMITED
33 Sir Isaac's Walk. 01206 577682
www.newtechnologyunlimited.com

Kingston-upon-Thames INFIDELITY
9 High Street, Hampton Wick.
020 8943 3530
www.infidelity.co.uk

Maidenhead AUDIO VENUE
36 Queen Street. 01628 633995
www.audiovenue.com

Rayleigh, Essex RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
44a High Street. 01268 779762
Custom Install Dept.
01268 776932
www.rayleighhifi.com

Southend-on-Sea RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
132/4 London Road. 01702 435255
www.rayleighhifi.com

Tunbridge Wells KENT HOME CINEMA
69 London Road, Southborough.
01892 535007
www.kenthomecinema.co.uk

LONDON

Ealing AUDIO VENUE
27 Bond Street. 020 8567 8703
www.audiovenue.com

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI
190a New North Road. 020 7226 5500
www.grahams.co.uk

SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS
61-63 Webbs Road, Battersea.
020 7924 2040
www.oandlhifi.co.uk

SW20 O'BRIEN HI-FI
60 Durham Road.
020 8946 1528
www.obrienhifi.com

MIDLANDS

Coventry FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE
163 Spon Street. 024 7652 5200
www.frankharvey.co.uk

Nottingham CASTLE SOUND & VISION
48/50 Maid Marian Way. 0115 9584404
www.castlesoundvision.com

Solihull MUSIC MATTERS
93-95 Hobs Moat Road. 0121 742 0254
www.musicmatters.co.uk

NORTH

Chester ACOUSTICA
17 Hoole Road. 01244 344227
www.acoustica.co.uk

York SOUND ORGANISATION
2 Gillygate. 01904 627108
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PLAYBACK

→Anton van Beek reviews **SAFE HOUSE** It's Reynolds vs Washington in this clash of the *HCC* favourites **WRATH OF THE TITANS 3D** Mythological mash-up hits 3D Blu-ray **THIS MEANS WAR** CIA agents go to battle over Reese Witherspoon **JOURNEY 2: THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND 3D** Jules Verne's novel gets an eye-popping stereoscopic update **AND MUCH MORE!**

Galactic goddess

Barbarella → Paramount → All-region BD (US Import)

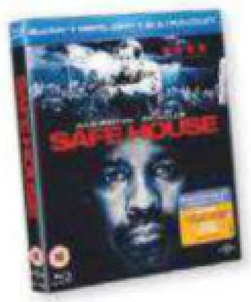
In our in-depth review on p100, we traverse the galaxy to see how well Jane Fonda's space siren has survived the transition to Blu-ray...



HCC Ratings key

Princess Leia	1 2 3 4 5
Wilma Deering	1 2 3 4 5
Stella Star	1 2 3 4 5
Galaxina	1 2 3 4 5
T-X Terminatrix	1 2 3 4 5

Storemags



High-octane home cinema

Quality cast and director ensure that this thriller ends up in safe hands

→ Safe House

Former CIA agent Tobin Frost (Denzel Washington) is a wanted man. Charged with high treason, Frost is about to be deported back to the US for questioning when the CIA safe house he's being held at in South Africa is attacked by mercenaries who want him dead. Soon he finds himself under the protection of rookie agent Matt Weston (Ryan Reynolds), who must not only keep Frost safe from attackers, but also try to stop the former agent escaping before he can hand Frost over to his superiors.

While *Safe House* offers little fresh in terms of plotting, it does have a trio of aces up its sleeves. The first two are the excellent leads, who elevate what would otherwise feel like clichéd genre material to a whole new level. The other is director Daniel (*Buried*) Espinosa, who injects the whole project with a Tony Scott-esque hyper-kinetic and gritty visual style. Thrilling stuff.

Picture: *Safe House*'s distinctive visual style (think gritty, grainy and overtly contrasted) is all present and correct in Universal's AVC 2.40:1 108p Blu-ray encode. But if this has you worried about how it'll perform in your home cinema, you shouldn't be. Not only is it true to source, it actually looks pretty striking, thanks to the combination of impossibly deep and inky blacks, primary colours that pop off the screen and the tremendous levels of fine detailing.

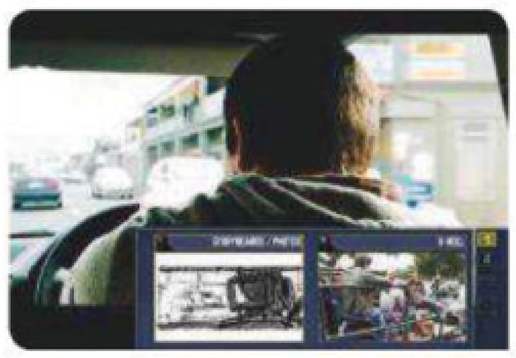
Audio: Fans of crash-bang-wallop audio will find plenty to love about this Blu-ray's DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 soundtrack. This is a seriously aggressive mix that goes out of its way to position you at the heart of a whirlwind of dynamic surround effects at all times. Subtle it isn't, but it breathes plenty of life and power into Chapter 6's car chase and Chapter 13's race through a rundown tenement. Admittedly, the muttered dialogue sometimes struggles to make itself heard – but surely that's just a good excuse to crank it up even louder...

Extras: One of the most exciting things about this Blu-ray release is that it doesn't feature the dull menu layout that Universal Pictures has been trotting out on its international releases since the day it first started releasing titles on the format. Hopefully this means that we've finally seen the back of them and the studio will start being a little more creative in future.

As for the extra features, *Safe House* serves up two *U-Control* viewing modes (*Picture-in-Picture* on 14 of the 20 chapters and *Scene Explorer* vignettes for two stunt sequences), seven behind-the-scenes featurettes (all in hi-def) and *My Scenes* functionality. The Blu-ray also ships with an UltraViolet digital copy of the film.



Denzel's car didn't have a front passenger seat



HCC VERDICT

Safe House → Universal Pictures
All-region BD → £25 Approx

We say: Daniel Espinosa's high-octane thriller benefits from very impressive AV on its Blu-ray debut

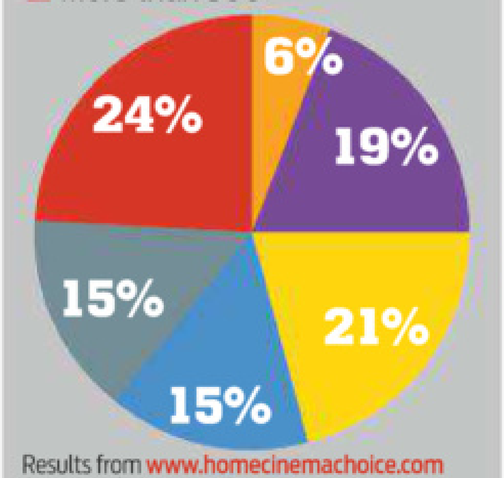
Picture: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Extras: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

We asked...

Roughly how many Blu-rays/DVDs do you own?

- Less than 10
- 11 - 50
- 51 - 100
- 101 - 250
- 251 - 500
- More than 500



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

Act of Valour

Momentum Pictures → Region B BD
£20 Approx



It might pretend to be an action movie, but *Act of Valour* is pure propaganda from start to finish – There are no question marks hanging over the incidents depicted – Instead we have a simple tale of clear-cut goodies and baddies, dressed up in a thin veil of 'authenticity' provided by the casting of real-life Navy Seals. A cynical exercise, one compounded by the decision to frequently employ a POV-style that resembles nothing more than *Call of Duty* games. The Blu-ray's extras dwell on the film's authenticity, while the AV performance is every bit as glossy as a typical Hollywood flick.

1 2 3 4 5

Wild Bill

Universal Pictures → Region B BD
£25 Approx



With its council estate locations populated by two-bit thugs and drug dealers, Dexter Fletcher's directorial debut looks like more of the same for contemporary British cinema. But while the story isn't particularly original, it's pulled off with surprising wit and a pleasingly deft touch at characterisation.

Universal's Blu-ray features an excellent AVC 1080p encode that brings the best out of the 2.40:1 widescreen cityscapes and makes amends for the limited DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio. The extras include ten deleted scenes and a 30-minute *Making of...* documentary.

1 2 **3** 4 5

Man on a Ledge

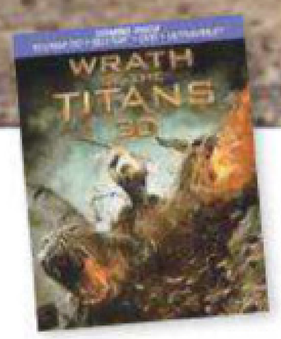
Momentum Pictures → Region B BD
£20 Approx



What is it about the concept of a man threatening to throw himself off a tall building that caught the Hollywood zeitgeist last year? This Sam Worthington vehicle lacks the introspection of *The Ledge*, instead anchoring the idea to a straightforward revenge narrative. Still, at least the film frequently looks and sounds superb thanks to the AVC 2.40:1 1080p imagery and DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix. Extras are limited to a bunch of interviews, a 15-minute promo featurette and the trailer (which comes complete with a forced commentary by actress Elizabeth Banks – most peculiar).

1 **2** 3 4 5





MONSTER SPECIAL

More hit than myth

Warner learns from its mistakes with a sequel that's a genuine titan of converted 3D

→ Wrath of the Titans 3D

An improvement on its disappointing predecessor, *Wrath of the Titans* ups the ante with even more mythological monsters for Perseus (Sam Worthington) to battle before unleashing Zeus' evil daddy, the titan Kronos, onto the battlefield. Okay, this silly sequel may resemble nothing more than a bigscreen adaptation of the *God of War* videogames. But who really cares? It's pure blockbuster spectacle from start to finish, packed with electrifying action scenes and excellent visual effects. And sometimes, that's all you really need.

Picture: Considering the slating its predecessor's 3D conversion received, you'd have thought that this sequel would be shot using 3D cameras. Well, it isn't. But this time around they planned the 3D from the get-go, and the MVC 1.78:1 1080p imagery looks absolutely sensational, with convincing depth and dimensionality, as well as impressive sharpness and rich colouring.

The latter aspects are even more pronounced on the accompanying 2D platter, whose AVC 1.78:1 1080p visuals are as robust, detailed and razor-sharp as you could hope for.



Audio: The film's Titans don't hold back from unleashing their wrath on your home cinema when it comes to the DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack accompanying both the 3D and 2D presentations. Naturally, it's the moments where the mythological monsters are wreaking havoc that deliver the biggest audio thrills and most obvious dynamics. But even away from this chaos, it's still a first-class mix that surprises with its subtle yet evocative ambient effects and rich vocal renditions. Bloody fantastic.

Extras: This stereoscopic Blu-ray release isn't blessed by an abundance of bonus features. Indeed, as is so often the case, the 3D platter offers nothing at all.

The 2D platter bundled alongside it fares a little better. Here you'll find three deleted scenes and a pair of *Maximum Movie Modes* – *Path of Men* focuses on the making of the film, while *Path of Gods* explores the mythology behind the story. The two modes cross over from time to time and you can switch between the two at any point. There are ten *Focus Point* featurettes spread between them, which can also be accessed directly from the disc menu. It also ships with a DVD and UltraViolet digital copy. >





HCC VERDICT

Wrath of the Titans 3D
Warner Home Entertainment
All-region BD/R1 DVD (US Import) → £30 Approx

We say: Superb AV ensures that this 3D BD will be a monster hit

Picture: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Sound: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Extras: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Movie: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5



These days some kids will stop at nothing to get the Prom King award



Not another teen movie

Jonah Hill and Channing Tatum go back to school in this slick and funny action comedy





HCC VERDICT

21 Jump Street → Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£23 Approx

We say: A wonderful Blu-ray outing for an hilarious film. Highly recommended

Picture: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Sound: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Extras: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

→ 21 Jump Street

Bewitched. *The Dukes of Hazzard*. *Lost in Space*. There are two things that link these movies – they all suck and they were all based on old TV shows. But no matter how many *Fat Albert*s or *Wild Wild Wests* studios churn out, the Hollywood bigwigs clearly feel that there's still plenty of money to be made from resurrecting cancelled TV shows as big-budget flicks. Which brings us to *21 Jump Street*, based on the late '80s cop show of the same name that made Johnny Depp a star.

As penned by Michael Bacall and Jonah Hill, this new bigscreen incarnation isn't exactly reverential to the series that inspired it. Nor is the whole concept of redoing old shows as films safe from the occasional 'meta' gag. For instance, when rookie cops Schmidt (Hill) and Stone (Channing Tatum) are reassigned to the recently restarted undercover division that will see them pose as students at a high school to root out drug dealers, they're informed that 'the guys in charge of this stuff lack creativity and are completely out of ideas. So all they do now is recycle s**t from the past and expect us not to notice'.

This is a little bit of honesty early on in a film that then sets out to do nothing more than subvert expectations and make it's audience laugh as frequently as possible. It achieves those aims admirably. In fact, I'm happy to report that *21 Jump Street* is the funniest mainstream Hollywood comedy I've seen in years.

Picture: *21 Jump Street* arrives on Blu-ray with a technically proficient but not exactly dazzling AVC-encoded 2.40:1 Full HD transfer. In many ways it's everything you'd expect from a high-definition treatment of a modern Hollywood production: sharp and detailed, with solid rock blacks and excellent contrast stability.

The only downside is that the film does look somewhat drab for much of its duration. This clearly appears to be an intentional decision, due to the richness of the primary colours in a handful of scenes and the frequently superb black levels. As such, it's not really something you can criticise the encode for, but it still holds *21 Jump Street* back from delivering the kind of hi-def eye-candy many people will want.

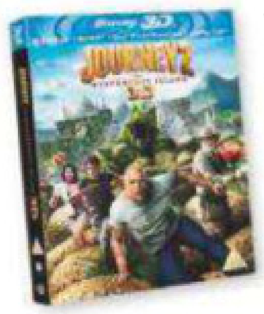
Audio: The Blu-ray's DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix copes very well with the film's soundtrack. Music and dialogue are both expressed well, and there's no shortage of directional effects and deep bass waiting to be unleashed in sequences such as Chapter 11's freeway chase and the final shoot-out that runs through Chapters 14 and 15. Yet another great mix from Sony Pictures.

Extras: This release boasts a very lively and frequently hilarious commentary from the film's directors and leading men, 20 deleted scenes, a gag reel, four behind-the-scenes featurettes (*Back to School*, *Brothers in Arms*, *Johnny Depp on Set* and *Peter Pan on the Freeway*) and two alternate take montages (*Cube-O-Rama* and *The Rob Riggle Show*). An UltraViolet digital copy is also included.

Take a trip to a 3D Blu-ray paradise

The visually spectacular fantasy sequel discovers the secret to stereoscopic success

→ Journey 2: The Mysterious Island 3D



Your ability to enjoy this belated sequel to 2008's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth 3D* will centre entirely on how much you like watching Jules Verne's pioneering science-fiction repackaged for kids, complete with pratfalls and jokes about bodily functions.

This time around Brendan Fraser is nowhere to be seen, with Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson and Michael Caine joining young Josh Hutcherson on a trip to Verne's 'Mysterious Island', home to tiny elephants, giant bees and other bizarre critters. Not really one for adults, but its target audience will probably love every minute.

Picture: Warner Home Video trots out yet another spectacular AVC 1.78:1 1080p transfer with this fantasy sequel. Bursting with vibrant colours and intricate detailing, it's a feast for the eyes and in ordinary circumstances it would be hard to know what the studio could possibly do to improve on it... until you check out the 3D disc. The MVC-encoded stereoscopic Blu-ray offers a near-flawless technical presentation and a completely convincing sense of dimensionality at all times. It's supremely impressive – indeed, the quality of the 3D Blu-ray experience is so good that it's solely responsible for that third star in this review's 'Movie' rating.

Audio: *Journey 2...*'s DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack is a match for the film's immersive 3D visuals. There's rarely a moment of screen time when the rear speakers aren't engaged, providing accurately positioned and thrillingly animated acoustic effects. The LFE-channel, meanwhile, is regularly used to shake your room with its thunderous bass extension. Couple all of that with warm, clear dialogue and music reproduction and you have a truly demo-worthy piece of sound design.

Extras: As always, the 3D disc has no extras whatsoever, meaning you have to stick in the accompanying 2D Blu-ray for any additional fun. Yet even that platter isn't straining under the weight of bonus goodies. Other than five deleted scenes and a gag reel, the only extra is the cumbersomely titled *Are You Strong Enough to Survive Mysterious Island?*, an interactive map that allows you to check out a selection of short behind-the-scenes vignettes.

As well as 2D and 3D Blu-ray discs, this set also includes a bonus DVD and UltraViolet Digital Copy – how long before these are called 'Four-Play' editions? Quite a while, probably.

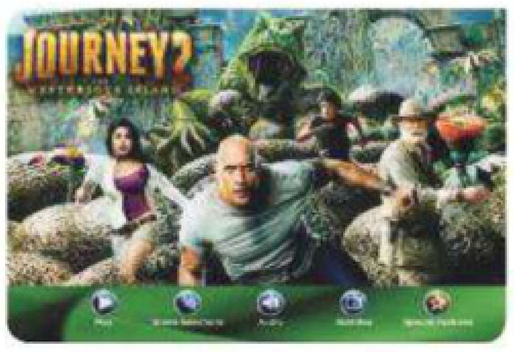


HCC VERDICT

Journey 2: The Mysterious World 3D → Warner Home Video → All-region BD/R2 DVD → £28 Approx

We say: A superb 3D encode that outshines its 2D counterpart

Picture: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Sound: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Extras: 1 **2** 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5



Mirror Mirror

StudioCanal → Region B BD/R2 DVD
£23 Approx



Apart from his typically bizarre taste in costume design, visionary director Tarsem Singh (*The Fall*, *Immortals*) struggles to bring anything fresh or exciting to the story of Snow White with this rather laboured post-modern take on the fairy tale. At least the eye-catching sets and costumes means that there is some hi-def eye-candy on offer from the disc's AVC 1.85:1 1080 transfer.

As well as being bundled with a bonus DVD copy of the film, the Blu-ray also serves up a lacklustre batch of extras in the form of five deleted scenes, four featurettes and a trailer.

1 **2** 3 4 5

One for the Money

Entertainment in Video → Region B BD → £20 Approx



I'm struggling to think of another film I've seen recently that was quite as lacking in charm and wit as this clunky comedy-drama about a female bounty hunter (Katherine Heigl) tracking down an old flame. Terrifyingly, it's based on a series of books that now runs to 18 volumes, which means there's plenty of scope for sequels...

Even the Blu-ray disc is pretty underwhelming, with its flat AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode and functional DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix. A deleted scene, gag reel and 11-minute *Making of...* make for some rather forgettable extras.

1 2 3 4 5

Meridian

88 Films → R0 DVD
£13 Approx

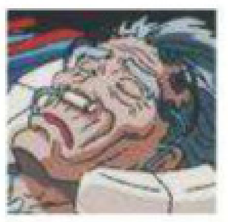


Twin Peaks starlet Sherilyn Fenn shows off her own 'twin peaks', and indulges in one of the weirdest sex scenes you'll ever witness, in this daft adult take on *Beauty and the Beast*. Compared to my old VHS copy (from the days when the film was released on these shores under the title *Phantoms*), 88 Film's new DVD is a revelation. The 1.33:1 full-frame transfer works wonders with the deliberately diffuse visuals (it's just a shame about the unavoidable softness of the burnt-in subtitles during a couple of scenes) and the stereo audio is clear. Extras include a promo featurette and trailers.

1 2 **3** 4 5

Roujin Z

Manga → Region B BD
£25 Approx

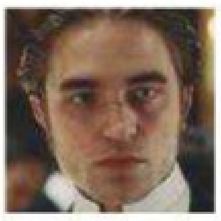


Concern about the country's aging population has proven to be a frequent source of inspiration for Japan's filmmakers. *Roujin Z* finds *Akira* creator Katsuhiro Otomo using it as the springboard for a droll sci-fi satire about a high-tech robotic hospital bed that runs amok. While the animation isn't particularly flash, it's faithfully captured in hi-def by this disc's attractive AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode. Audio comes in a choice of DTS-HD MA 5.1 Japanese (dynamically limited, but satisfying) and Dolby Digital 2.0 English (comparatively flat and thin). Sadly there are no extras.

1 2 **3** 4 5

Bel Ami

StudioCanal → Region B BD
£23 Approx

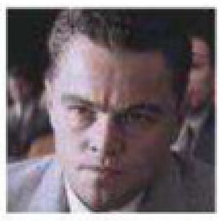


Adapted from the steamy 1885 novel by Guy de Maupassant, you'd be forgiven for expecting some top-notch *Dangerous Liasons*-style thrills from this Parisian bodice-ripper. But despite all of the sex and intrigue on offer, it's a curiously flat affair, not helped in any way by Robert Pattinson's dead-eyed performance as a rogue bedding his way through a swathe of aristocratic ladies. Still, while the film is a damp squib, the Blu-ray is a bit more satisfying thanks to a cinematic AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode and evocative DTS-HD MA 5.1 sound mix. It also squeezes in over an hour of interviews.

1 2 3 4 5

J. Edgar

Warner Home Video → Region B BD/ R2 DVD → £23 Approx



It may have promised so much, but Clint Eastwood's biopic of the founder of the FBI proves surprisingly unexciting, with most of the thrills coming from Leonardo DiCaprio's utterly bizarre accent and unconvincing old-age makeup in the title role. Things aren't helped by Eastwood's typically 'thoughtful' direction, which conspires with the dull plotting to make the 137-minute runtime feel like an eternity. The BD's AVC 2.40:1 1080p drab imagery is true to source and holds plenty of fine detail. Apart from bonus DVD and UltraViolet copies of the film, the only extra is an 18-minute featurette.

1 2 3 4 5

Malcolm X

Warner Home Video → All-region BD
£20 Approx

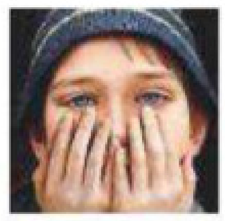


Spike Lee's powerful account of the life and death of Civil Rights activist Malcolm X is just as electrifying and engrossing as it was back in 1992. Surprisingly, though, Lee's film has never been treated particularly well in the UK in the past, with the old DVD being a barebones release. This Blu-ray redresses the situation with a richly detailed AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode and effective DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix. It also serves up a fascinating 30-minute account of Lee's struggle to get the film made his way, an insightful commentary, nine deleted scenes and the theatrical trailer.

1 2 3 4 5

Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close

Warner Home Video → All-region BD/R2 DVD → £20 Approx



Anybody with an allergy to overt sentiment would do well to keep clear of Stephen Daldry's post-9/11 melodrama. For every poignant moment delivered by this story of an autistic boy coming to terms with his father's death in the Twin Towers, it's quickly swallowed up by overt sentiment and contrived plotting.

Daldry's film comes to Blu-ray with highly impressive AVC 2.40:1 1080p visuals and an immersive DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack. Best of the extras is the *Ten Years Later* featurette, which proves much more moving than the film itself.

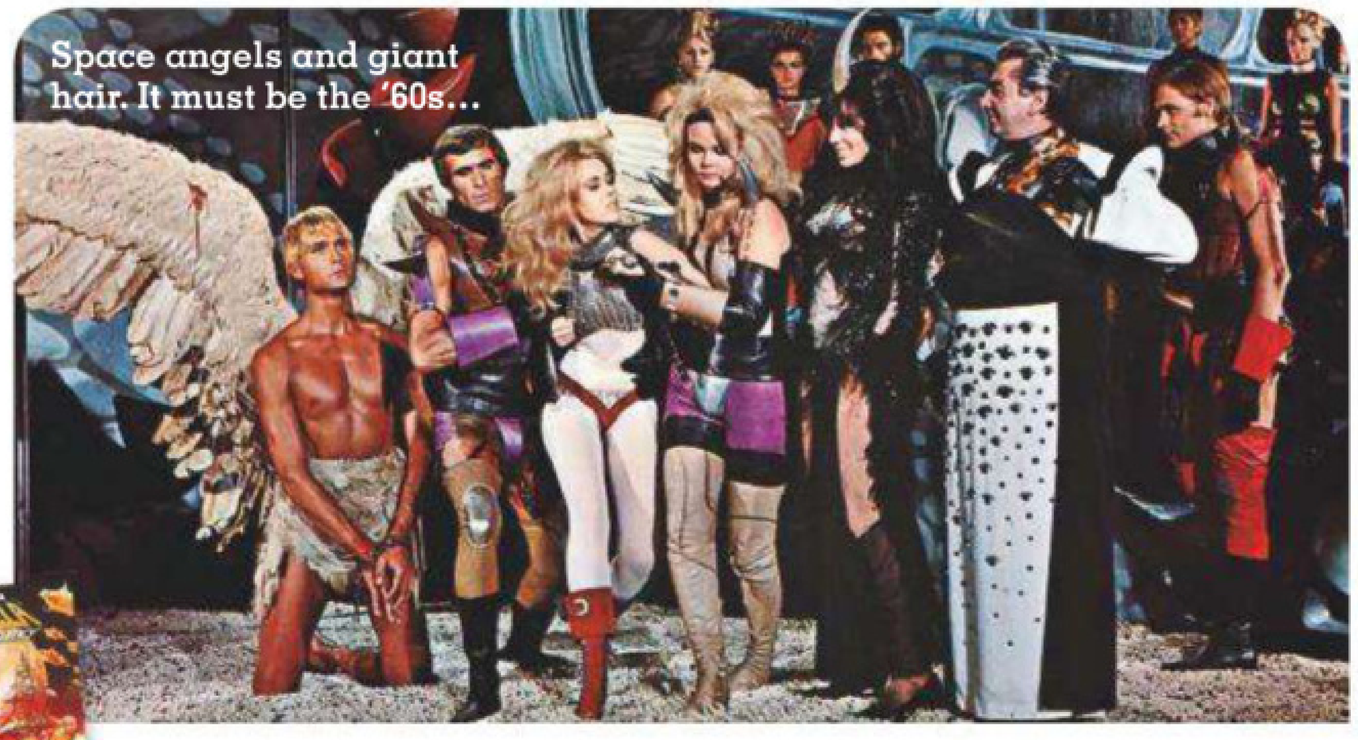
1 2 3 4 5

Raunchy rocketeer returns

Jane Fonda's sexy space siren scrubs up extremely well in high-definition

→ Barbarella

Roger Vadim's 1968 star vehicle for then wife Jane Fonda is an extremely odd movie. Based on a French comic book series, *Barbarella* wastes no time on such niceties as plot or characterisation. Instead, it's all about a sultry babe playing dress-up and having a series of erotic encounters in outer space. It should, therefore, be absolute rubbish, but the tongue-in-cheek nature of the whole endeavour, coupled with Fonda's brilliant central performance, lifts *Barbarella* to a higher plateau. Not necessarily a 'good' film in the traditional sense, but still a lot of fun.



Space angels and giant hair. It must be the '60s...



Picture: Lightweight in plotting it may be, but *Barbarella* is a true heavyweight in terms of art design. And, even if few of the aesthetic decisions make any sense, you can still see their influence on furniture and fashion in expensive boutique shops throughout the world.

Given the above, there was an awful lot riding on how the film would look on Blu-ray. The answer is that the film's AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode, like Barbarella herself, is an absolute stunner. Colours are richly saturated, textures are intricately detailed and fine grain is accurately rendered. All told, with the exception of a few speckles here and there and some soft optical shots, it looks like it could have been filmed last year. Exceptional.

Audio: Rather than waste time cooking up a new-fangled surround sound mix, Paramount has instead taken the decision to simply make the most of *Barbarella*'s original acoustic charms for this Blu-ray release. As such, the only soundtrack on offer is a Dolby TrueHD 2.0 presentation of the original mono mix.

And you know what? It actually sounds rather good. The audio is clean and precise (with no annoying pops or hiss to be heard), dialogue sounds natural and the groovy score exhibits plenty of range. A satisfying presentation for a film of this vintage, but unlikely to trouble your AVR.

Extras: Sadly, this is where things start to go a bit wonky. As with all of the movie's previous DVD incarnations, *Barbarella*'s Blu-ray debut is devoid of any extras beyond the film's theatrical trailer (albeit here presented in 1080p). That's a real shame, as surely somebody involved in the film's production (or even a genre historian) would have interesting things to say about the movie if anybody could be bothered to talk to them.

The only other item of note is the packaging, with this US release boasting a gorgeous gatefold slipcase that showcases the movie's stunning poster art.

HCC VERDICT

Barbarella → Paramount
All-region BD (US Import) → £18 Approx (www.movietyme.com)

We say: A sultry hi-def release spoiled by a lack of extras

Picture: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Sound: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Extras: **1** 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5



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Arcade action

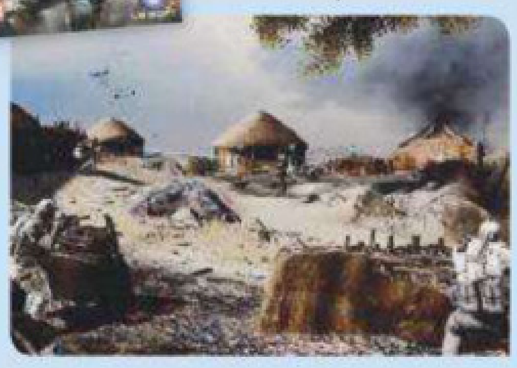
Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. Check out these two videogames vying for time on your home cinema system...

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier

Ubisoft → Xbox 360/PS3/PC → £50 Approx



The latest entry in this bullets-'n'-brains franchise sees you once again join a team of Ghosts (hard-as-nails special operatives) in a globe-trotting tale of dodgy Russians, nuclear weapons and hi-tech weaponry.



In the single-player mission mode it's a total blast, mixing nerve-wracking stealth attacks with free-fire gun battles to delicious effect. The learning curve is just about right, although the overall story arc could be longer. Of course, there is a 'guerilla' mode where you fight off repeated hordes of baddies, bet it gets tricky quickly and is best tackled with a chum.

As an AV experience ...*Future Soldier* is first-rate. Some minor quibbles aside (some of the menus seem to lack razor-sharpness and the cut-scenes aren't as polished as they could be), the HD graphics are solid, with neat cinematic flourishes (such as the 'camera' shaking when you come under heavy fire). And the audio is beyond reproach. Nudge your AVR up a notch and you'll feel like you're in *Black Hawk Down*. Explosions thunder through the front soundstage, machine-gun fire has an immediate, violent presence, and the surround channels place you perfectly in the middle of the mayhem. Even the score is suitably broody – but it's easier to play the game with it switched off, unfortunately. ***MC***

1 2 3 4 **5**

Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes

Warner Bros. Interactive → Xbox 360/PS3/Wii/PC → £50 Approx





Traveller's Tales has been churning out Lego games based on licensed characters for years now and we keep eating them up. Yet very little has changed about the basic template of the series. You (and maybe a friend) take control of a couple of cute Lego characters and set about playing through a series of levels, based around the principles of solving puzzles by building things out of Lego and collecting studs that can be spent on extra characters. And *Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes* does nothing to break the mould.

But is this necessarily a bad thing? For most fans, the answer will be no. While it may not be the best *Batman* game around (take a bow *Arkham City*), it is the most polished Lego game to date. The tweaks are small, but do make a difference. Gotham City provides a rich open world environment for your characters to play around in and makes for a spectacular visual experience on a big screen. It's also the first game in the series to feature actual dialogue, leading to a rich vein of tongue-in-cheek humour. Add to this a wealth of bonus puzzles and a cornucopia of unlockable characters and there's plenty to get stuck into. But let's hope for something a little more innovative next time around.

1 2 3 **4** 5

The Aristocats: Special Edition

Walt Disney Home Entertainment → All-region BD → £20 Approx



The last animated project to be approved personally by Walt Disney before his death in 1966, *The Aristocats* is a jazz-infused blast of feline fun whose reputation has only grown in recent years. While not afforded feature-laden Diamond Edition status, this Special Edition Blu-ray still maintains the sort of technical quality we've come to expect from the studio. Despite suspicions of digital smoothing to eliminate grain, the AVC 1.66:1 1080p encode is a riot of bold colours and scratchy linework, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix makes the most of the musical numbers.

1 2 3 **4** 5

The Innkeepers

Metrodome → All-region BD → £20 Approx



With his '70s-throwback horror *The House of the Devil*, writer/director Ti West marked himself out as one of the most promising figures in the US horror scene. Now he's delivered on that promise with this wonderful slow-burning chiller set in a haunted hotel. As it's also one of those films that reward multiple viewings it's a real joy to see it hold up so well in HD. The AVC 2.40:1 1080p transfer retains the authentic feel of 35mm filmstock and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is a masterpiece of multichannel sound design. The extras include two excellent commentaries.

1 2 3 **4** 5

King of New York

Arrow Video → Region B BD/R2 DVD → £23 Approx

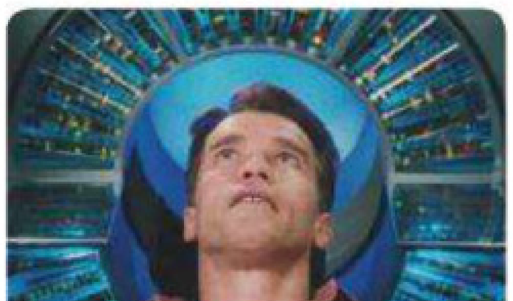


Like so many great films, Abel Ferrara's gangster classic was greeted with hostility by critics on its original release. Skip forward 22 years and it's a very different story, with the film now deservedly held in high regard. This sensational Blu-ray's AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode boasts excellent contrast and detailing. And while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 remix is pretty horrible, the original LPCM 2.0 audio sounds every bit as good as the film looks. The set also serves up a plethora of extras, including two commentaries, interviews and a superb 80-minute documentary about Ferrara.

1 2 3 4 **5**

Total Recall: Ultimate Rekall Edition

Studio Canal → Region B BD/R2 DVD → £25 Approx



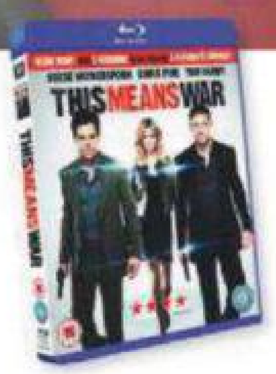
'If I'm not me, then who the hell am I?' Oh how we've come to love *Total Recall* over the years. While not Paul Verhoeven's best work in the US, the director still got the very best out of leading man Arnold Schwarzenegger, while dropping him into a more ambiguous story than you'd expect from '90s Hollywood. This new release trumps the previous UK BD with a vastly improved director-approved AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode. It also serves up all of the old Special Edition DVD extras, plus a few exclusive goodies, including an engaging new 35-minute chat with Verhoeven.

1 2 3 **4** 5

storemags



Hardy and Pine took their love of *GTA IV* seriously



War! What is it good for?

Half-baked mash-ups of romantic-comedies and action movies apparently

→ This Means War

Having produced the TV series *Chuck* and been director on the show's pilot episode, you might think that McG has a pretty good idea how to successfully mix romance and spy shenanigans.

Which makes *This Means War*'s failings all the more curious. There are some good laughs along the way, but there's also a strange lack of chemistry and some leaden plotting in this tale of two CIA agents (Tom Hardy and Chris Pine) vying for the love of the same woman (Reese Witherspoon).

Picture: Hot and grainy. Those are the first two words that pop into your mind when you check out the AVC 2.40:1 Full HD encode of *This Means War* on Blu-ray. The former, because the colours in this film have been pumped up to almost cartoon-like levels during colour grading, with skin colours veering towards the sort of oranges normally seen in a Tango ad. And, as for the latter, there's a persistently heavy layer of grain present throughout the film that actually impacts on fine detailing in medium and long shots.

However, it's worth noting that I was struck by the exact same thoughts when I saw the film projected theatrically. That, coupled with McG's comments on the Blu-ray's chat-track and what he told me when I interviewed him (see the *HCC* website), leave me in no doubt that this is exactly what the film is supposed to look like. Even if it won't necessarily be to everyone's taste.

Audio: If nothing else, it's hard to think of another rom-com that delivers quite as much in the way of audio bombast as *This Means War*. The opening action scene sets the stage, with plenty of attention-grabbing use of the surrounds and forceful bass impacts. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix does settle down every now and again as the story's focus shifts towards romance, but you can rest assured that even then there are still plenty of moments of aural showboating in the pipeline, be it a frantic paintball massacre or just the all-pervading surround sound ambience of pounding music inside a nightclub. The track also does an sterling job of emphasizing the dialogue and music present in the mix.

Extras: Extras here run to a choice of theatrical and extended cuts of the film, an audio commentary on the latter from McG, six deleted scenes with optional commentary, three alternate endings with optional commentary, an alternate opening in pre-viz form with optional commentary, the trailer and a gag reel. The biggest disappointment though is the excised 'Bachelorette Party' footage, which really isn't particularly funny, nor as rude as McG made it out to be when I spoke to him. Shame. >







HCC VERDICT

This Means War → 20th Century Fox → All-region BD → £25 Approx

We say: McG's action-rom-com struggles to hit the target, but this BD is still worth a rental

Picture: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Extras: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Movie: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5









Box office: *Gentlemen…* and *How to Marry…* were two of 1953's biggest hits *(left)*

Wild thing: Billy Wilder plays up Monroe's sex-bomb status in *The Seven Year Itch* and *Some Like It Hot (below)*













Gentlemen prefer HD

Forget diamonds, these days it's obvious that Blu-ray is Marilyn Monroe's best friend





HCC VERDICT

Forever Marilyn: 4 Film Collection → 20th Century Fox
All-region BD → £55 Approx

We say: A good first showing for Monroe in hi-def. Now, can we have the rest please?

Picture: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Sound: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Extras: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

→ Forever Marilyn

It's now 50 years since screen icon and sex symbol Marilyn Monroe passed away, but during that time her star power has not diminished one iota. Strange, then that until now none of her films have been released on Blu-ray in the UK. This four-disc set brings together four of her best (and best-loved) titles – *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *How to Marry a Millionaire*, *The Seven Year Itch* and *Some Like It Hot*. So let's get stuck in…

Picture: It's hard to imagine that anybody will complain about the clarity, colour reproduction and accurate registration of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*' AVC 1.33:1 1080p transfer, which are streets ahead of any previous version of the film I've encountered. However, there's a lack of fine detailing that some will put down to digital filtering and sharpening. This could actually be down to the source materials used for this Blu-ray release, though – presumably a combination of the same restored three-strip Technicolor elements and a black-and-white fine grain master that also served as the basis of the film's 2002 DVD release.

How to Marry a Millionaire was the first film to be shot using the CinemaScope process ('You see it without glasses') and the Blu-ray's AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode brings it to the home with aplomb. Colours are somewhat less robust than *Gentlemen…*'s, but this is to be expected given the filmstock used, as are the slight softness and heavy grain found in the image. Many of the same comments can be made about *The Seven Year Itch*'s AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode, which also stands tall as the best-looking home version of the film I've ever seen.

Finally we come to *Some Like It Hot*. This disc's AVC 1.66:1 1080p transfer excels at reproducing the film's grainy black-and-white cinematography, although there are a few little marks here and there that make you think a newer remaster could make it look even better.

Audio: All four of the films feature lovingly remixed DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtracks that stay focused on the front of your speaker array and don't distract with gimmicky surround effects. In addition, *Gentlemen…* features a Dolby Digital 1.0 track, *How to…* a Dolby Digital 3.0 mix and *The Seven Year Itch* a Dolby Digital 4.0 incarnation.

Extras: The two earliest Monroe films in the set sadly offer up very little in the way of extras besides trailers and a short archival Movietone news reel for each.

The Seven Year Itch shows what could have been done with its commentary track, a DTS-HD MA 5.1 isolated score, *The Hays Code* picture-in-picture mode (exploring film censorship, accompanied by an on-screen 'Sexual Innuendo Meter'), interactive filmography, deleted scenes and documentaries. And *Some Like It Hot* continues in a similar vein, with a commentary, four retrospective documentaries, the trailer and a lengthy 'virtual' stills and clips gallery.

Double Indemnity

Eureka– The Masters of Cinema Series → Region B BD → £25 Approx



This second Billy Wilder film to make it into the Masters of Cinema lineup proves every bit as satisfying as *The Long Weekend*. The AVC 1.37:1 1080p transfer's clarity and overall stability allows the distinctive black-& -white film noir visuals to truly shine, while the DTS-HD MA 2.0 soundtrack is as crisp, clean and stable as any fan could ever reasonably hope for.

Just as pleasing are the extras. These include an engrossing commentary, in-depth documentary, 1945 radio adaptation, trailer and 36-page booklet.

1 2 3 4 **5**

The Caine Mutiny

Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx

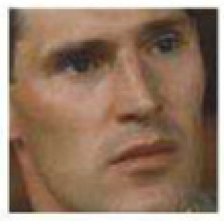


Sony Pictures has repeatedly proven itself to be one of the best in the business when it comes to restoring classic films for Blu-ray, and this 1954 World War II drama starring Humphrey Bogart and José Ferrer is no exception. While there are some obvious source-based inconsistencies, there's no denying the overall quality of the film-like AVC 1.85:1 1080p presentation. Similarly, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix can't hold a candle to a modern mix, it serves the film well and every audio element has been meticulously restored. A two-part *Making of...*, trailers and commentary make up the extras.

1 2 3 **4** 5

Chariots of Fire

20th Century Fox → All-region BD
£13 Approx



This timely Blu-ray release gives film fans the opportunity to rediscover Hugh Hudson's sharp and intelligent award-winner from its position as the token whipping boy for those opposed to the UK film industry's 1980s obsession with 'heritage cinema'. Visually, the AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode may not win gold from those looking for glossy AV perfection, but it's still an excellent attempt, capturing the authentic look of the film. Similarly, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is very sympathetic to the original elements and rarely strays into the rear speakers. The disc also serves up a wealth of fan-pleasing extras.

1 2 3 **4** 5

Revolution: The Director's Cut

BFI → Region B BD/R2 DVD
£23 Approx



After *Chariots of Fire* it was thought that director Hugh Hudson could do no wrong. But then came his 1985 flop *Revolution*, which has gone under something of a reappraisal since Hudson unveiled his shortened Director's Cut in 2009. While still far from perfect, it is a better film – although you can make up your own mind with this impressive BFI Blu-ray release, which includes restored AVC 2.40:1 1080p presentations of both cuts alongside a 12-min director's statement. The bonus DVD copy of the film adds two further featurettes and a trailer.

1 2 **3** 4 5



Eureka paints the town Blu

Billy Wilder's boozy drama proves totally intoxicating in high-definition

→ The Lost Weekend

During a career that spanned more than five decades, writer-director Billy Wilder was responsible for a string of classic films including *Some Like It Hot*, *Double Indemnity*, *The Apartment* and *Sunset Boulevard*. But his crowning achievement was this powerful 1945 drama about alcoholism. Raw, powerful and truthful, *The Lost Weekend* often makes for uncomfortable viewing, thanks to Wilder's intense direction and the stunning central performance he gets out of Ray Milland as an alcoholic New York writer whose life slips further and further away as he pursues that 'one last drink'. Unmissable.

Picture: Eureka has worked its magic once again, delivering a sensational AVC 1.37:1 high-definition presentation that belies the fact that *The Lost Weekend* is now nearly 70 years old. While there are still occasional signs of wear and tear in the form of minor scratches and other blemishes, there's nothing particularly serious. And there's certainly nothing that detracts from the impact of the encode's impeccable contrast levels, remarkable detailing (most evident in close-ups) and its deft ability to perfectly resolve the native film grain.

Audio: *The Lost Weekend* staggers onto Blu-ray with a perfectly agreeable DTS-HD Master Audio 2.0 presentation of the original mono soundtrack. Obviously, the age and limited nature of the source elements mean that it doesn't really offer up anything you could use to showcase your system. That's what *Avatar* is for. However, it does impress from a technical standpoint, due to the complete lack of pop, hiss and other distortion that regularly effects films of this vintage. The dialogue, Foley effects and score are all equally well handled.



'No we don't serve ladies in this bar. You have to bring your own'

HCC VERDICT

The Lost Weekend → Eureka – The Masters of Cinema Series
Region B BD → £25 Approx

We say: Wilder's classic drama gets the hi-def disc it deserves

Picture: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Sound: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Extras: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Movie: 1 2 3 4 **5**

Overall: 1 2 3 4 **5**



Extras: The unquestionable highlight here (and a serious contender for one of the best extra features ever) is the fascinating *Billy, How Did You Do It?* First screened in early 1992 as part of the BBC's *Arena* strand of documentaries, this epic three-part interview with Wilder runs a mammoth 183 minutes and covers everything from his own career and films to the work of other filmmakers that he admires. It more than makes up for the lack of any significant film-specific extras on Eureka's disc and is a must-see for any dedicated film fan.

Also included on the Blu-ray are a short introduction by film director Alex Cox, the original theatrical trailer and the 1946 Screen Guild Theater radio adaptation of *The Lost Weekend*.

The disc is accompanied by a 36-page booklet containing essays about the film and its director.

Demo screen

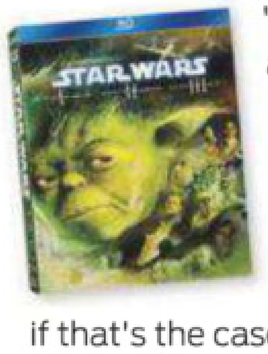
Watch in awe as **Revenge of the Sith** unleashes the full power of the Force in HD...



Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith

20th Century Fox → All-region BD → £45 Approx (Prequel Trilogy Boxset)

Time code: 106.44 – 121.14



'Only a Sith deals in absolutes,' claims Obi-Wan Kenobi as he realises that he is going to have to fight former Padawan Anakin Skywalker at the climax of ...*Revenge of the Sith*. Well, if that's the case then you might as well start calling me Darth van Beek, because I'm absolutely positive that the final film in George Lucas' *Star Wars* prequel trilogy climaxes with one of the best AV demos you'll ever experience.

As had become traditional in Lucas' sci-fi saga by this time ...*Revenge of the Sith*'s climax cuts and forth between two different battles as Obi-Wan fights Anakin on the volcanic planetoid Mustafar, while Yoda takes on Darth Sidious in the Senate on Coruscan – both making the most of this sensational Blu-ray's AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode and DTS-HD MA 6.1 soundtrack.

Sith happens

Visually, the two sequences couldn't be more different. The former is awash with deep blacks and reds with the only light source in many of the scenes coming from the rivers of molten lava. Meanwhile the latter is all crisp lines and bright interior lighting. Both provide ample amounts of eye-candy, from the insane detailing present in the close-ups of Yoda's face to the stark silhouettes of Obi-Wan and Anakin duelling in front of an explosion of magma.

Incredibly, the audio is even better. Whether it's the sound of huge chunks of the Senate being thrown around the room or that visceral reaction you get from actually feeling the deep electronic hum of a lightsaber, every element of the mix is perfectly balanced. Power and precision coming together to the upmost effect – and all backed by the booming percussion and angelic voices of John Williams' score.

It's all so good, that it nearly convinces you it was worth the previous 360+ minutes of *Star Wars* prequels to get there

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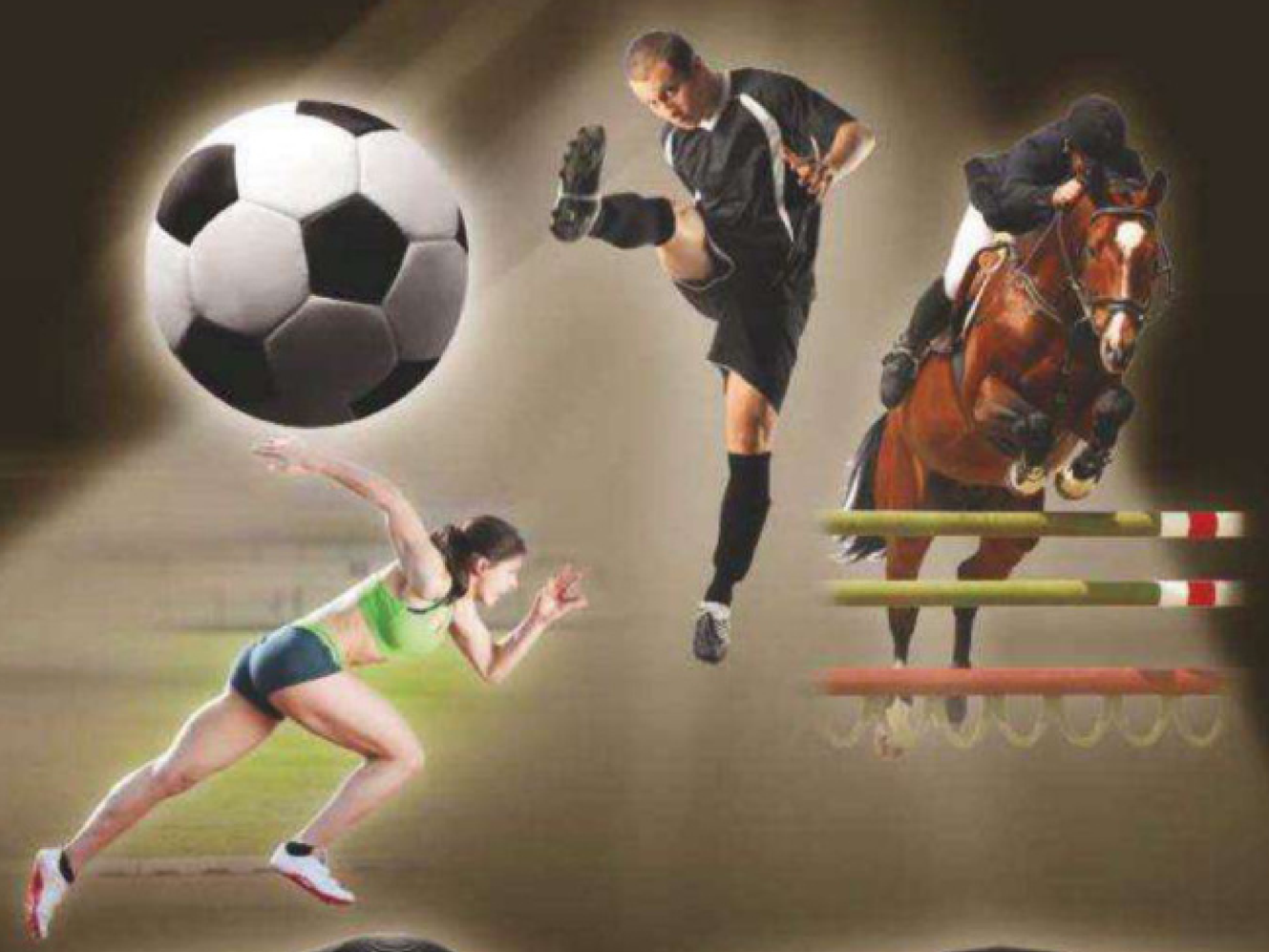
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HCC Issue 206



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SELECT

→ Buying Guide Looking to purchase a new TV, AVR, speaker set, PJ, media player, BD deck or surround sound system? Our Buying Guide is here to help. It's updated every issue with the latest reviews, and highlights the major specs so you can see at a glance what kit is right for you. And remember that the prices listed are the original RRPs – shop around and you'll often find them for less!



HCC Ratings key

Officially awesome	1 2 3 4 **5**
Essential purchase	1 2 3 **4** 5
Does the job	1 2 **3** 4 5
Disappointing	1 **2** 3 4 5
Don't touch it	**1** 2 3 4 5

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TV screens



	Manufacturer	Model	Price	Size (inches)	3D type	Panel type	HDMI	Component	PC	Networking	Internet TV	Wi-fi ready	Freeview HD	Freesat HD	Issue	Rating	Comment
	LG	50PZ950T	£1,600	50	A	PDP	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	196	4	Excellent all rounder, minor judder
	LG	55LW980T	£2,500	55	P	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	202	5	Rear LED, passive TV is superb
	LG	47LM670	£1,500	47	P	LED	3	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	209	4	Shadow detailing could be better
	LG	55LM660T	£2,100	55	P	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	208	4	Passive 3D impresses at this size
	Loewe	Individual Compose 3D	£5,000	46	A	LED	3	1	1	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	202	4	Debut 3D screen offers motorised control and built-in HDD
NEW ENTRY	Panasonic	TX-P55VT50	£3,100	55	A	PDP	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	210	5	Flagship plasma with pics to match
	Panasonic	TX-L42E3B	£600	42	–	LED	3	1	1	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	200	3	No frills 42in LED seems expensive
NEW ENTRY	Panasonic	TX-L42WT50	£1,800	42	A	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	210	4	High ticket price, gorgeous design
	Panasonic	TX-P42ST30	£1,200	42	A	PDP	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	198	3	Entry-level 3D plasma
	Panasonic	TX-P50ST50	£1,400	50	A	PDP	3	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	208	4	Mid-range PDP, smooth motion
	Panasonic	TX-L47DT50	£2,000	47	A	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	209	5	Pricey, but an excellent performer
	Philips	42PFL7666	£900	42	P	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	207	4	Affordable Passive Ambilight
	Philips	50PFL7956	£2,000	50	P	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	205	5	21:9 ratio TV for the masses
	Philips	46PFL9706	£2,300	46	A	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	204	5	Moth Eye tech reaps benefits
	Samsung	UE40D6530	£1,100	40	A	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	198	4	Brilliant pictures and Smart skills
NEW ENTRY	Samsung	PS51E8000	£1,700	51	A	PDP	3	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	210	4	Good plasma all-rounder
	Samsung	UE60D8000	£4,300	60	A	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	200	5	Big screen comes with a big price
	Samsung	UE40D5520	£600	40	–	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	200	5	Superb budget set is hard to fault
	Samsung	PS64D8000	£2,400	64	A	PDP	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	204	4	Giant plasma at a good price
	Samsung	PS51D6900	£1,000	51	A	PDP	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	198	4	Aggressively priced 3D bigscreen
	Samsung	UE55ES8000	£2,500	55	A	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	206	5	Seductive design, full of features
	Samsung	UE46ES7000	£1,700	46	A	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	209	5	Saves cash on the ES8000 model
	Sharp	LC-46LE831E	£1,300	46	A	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	199	5	Sharp's best LED screen ever
	Sharp	LC-60LE636E	£2,600	60	–	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	208	4	Get it for as little as £1,200 online
	Sony	KDL-40CX523	£550	40	–	CCFL	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	200	4	CCFL screen packs tons of features
	Sony	KDL-40HX723	£1,300	40	A	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	201	4	Excellent bigscreen all-rounder
	Sony	KDL-40EX524	£800	40	–	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	197	4	Great features, decent 2D-only pics
	Sony	KDL-55HX853	£1,800	55	A	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	209	5	Class-leading motion handling
	Toshiba	42RL853	£600	42	–	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	199	3	Affordable 42incher with few frills
	Toshiba	47VL863	£900	47	P	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	201	3	Suffers from limited contrast
	Toshiba	32UL863	£500	32	–	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	204	4	Feature-rich 32incher impresses
	Toshiba	40RL858	£500	40	–	LED	3	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	206	4	No 3D, but a good all-round effort
	Toshiba	55WL863	£1,800	55	A	LED	4	1	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	203	5	CEVO-powered TV is first-rate

A= Active, P= Passive

TV SCREENS EXPLAINED...

PLASMA VS LCD. PLUS, 3D'S RIVAL SYSTEMS

The TV market is becoming increasingly dominated by LED-lit LCD screens that are much thinner than traditional cold cathode fluorescent lamp (CCFL) screens. For 42in and above, plasma display panels (PDPs) come into play. These generally offer superior black levels, better viewing angles and less 3D cross-talk, but less brightness.

Most 3D screens feature the Active system that uses expensive powered 3D specs to deliver full HD images to each eye. Passive 3D TVs have a filter over the screen and use non-powered specs with polarising filters. The glasses are cheap as chips, but the resolution of 3D is halved to 540 lines.

Editor's Choice...



SONY

55in → KDL-55HX853
→ £1,800 Approx

Sony has returned to form with this 55in LED 3DTV that majors on detail and motion handling, and sports a price that undercuts similar-sized rivals. Buy with confidence.

Tested: Issue 209
For more info visit: www.sony.co.uk

Blu-ray players



Manufacturer	Model	Price	BD Live storage	3D	Multi-channel analogue out	HDMI	USB	Online portal	Wi-fi ready	DVD-Audio/ SACD	Issue	Rating	Comment
Arcam	FMJ-BDP100	£1,000	⊖	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖/⊖	194	4	Rock-solid build quality and pics to match
Cambridge Audio	Azur 751BD	£800	⊕	⊕	⊕	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕/⊕	199	5	Universal deck performs well, needs more 'net
Denon	DBP-1611UD	£400	⊕	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊕/⊕	194	4	Awful GUI but 3D pics are as good as it gets
Denon	DBP-2012UD	£750	⊕	⊕	⊕	1	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊕/⊕	198	4	High-performance player with battleship build
Dune	Smart B1	£240	⊖	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	198	4	Advanced networking features will wow techies
LG	BX580	£150	⊖	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	189	3	Reasonable BD pics, messy DVD upscaler
LG	BD670	£170	⊖	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	199	4	Smart BD player offers great value
Marantz	UD7006	£800	⊕	⊕	⊕	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕/⊕	200	4	Superior AV performance and tasty design
Onkyo	BD-SP808	£500	⊖	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖/⊖	195	4	Accomplished disc spinner. Slow disc loader
Onkyo	BD-SP809	£500	⊕	⊕	⊖	2	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖/⊖	203	3	Performs well, but lacks features for this price
Oppo	BDP-95EU	£900	⊕	⊕	⊕	2	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊕/⊕	197	5	Even better build and results than the BDP-93EU
Oppo	BDP-93EU	£500	⊕	⊕	⊕	2	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊕/⊕	195	5	Awesomely good video and music performance
Oppo	BDP-83SE	£1,300	⊖	⊖	⊕	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊕/⊕	190	4	Precision engineered analogue audio output
Panasonic	DMP-BD75	£110	⊖	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖/⊖	196	3	OK images, quick loader, underwhelming to use
Panasonic	DMP-BDT310	£260	⊖	⊕	⊖	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	194	5	Terrific new GUI, refined sound and pictures
Panasonic	DMP-BDT300	£260	⊖	⊕	⊕	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	194	4	Versatile, aging deck. Look out for discounts
Panasonic	DMP-BDT500	£300	⊖	⊕	⊕	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	208	4	Sonically superior, awkward touchpad remote
Panasonic	DMP-BDT320	£230	⊖	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	209	4	No twin HDMI or analogue out; good performer
Panasonic	BFT800EBK	£650	⊕	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	192	4	Built-in soundbar and iPod dock. Great 3D pics
Philips	BDP7600	£200	⊖	⊕	⊕	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	198	4	Feature-heavy deck with open web browser
Philips	BDP7500 MKII	£200	⊕	⊕	⊕	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	194	4	Slickly designed with decent 2D and 3D images
Primare	BD32	£3,500	⊕	⊕	⊕	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕/⊕	206	5	Ultimate high-end universal player
Samsung	BD-D7500	£250	⊕	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	198	4	Style-centric wall-mountable 3D player
Samsung	BD-D6900	£300	⊖	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖/⊖	195	4	Decent BD deck with built-in Freeview HD tuner
Samsung	BD-C6900	£255	⊕	⊕	⊕	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	194	3	Quick loader, versatile deck. Passable pictures
Samsung	BD-E8500	£400	⊕	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	207	4	Smart PVR with 3D Blu-ray playback
Sharp	BD-HP90S	£290	⊕	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	194	3	Slot-loading vertical design, expensive
Sony	BDP-S380	£130	⊖	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊕	199	3	Budget player misses out on 3D and networking
Sony	BDP-S480	£150	⊖	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊕	198	4	Brilliant deck offers superior VOD at a low price
Sony	BDP-SX1	£300	⊖	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖/⊖	202	3	Portable, WSVGA resolution, but outputs Full HD
Sony	BDP-S185	£90	⊖	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖/⊖	204	4	Solid budget way to get IPTV and Blu-ray
Sony	BDP-S790	£240	⊖	⊕	⊖	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊕	210	5	Peerless video performance, 4K upscaling NEW ENTRY
Toshiba	BDX3100	£185	⊖	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖/⊖	194	3	Feature-light but does the job with solid pics
Toshiba	BDX3200	£150	⊖	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖/⊖	197	3	Unexciting player can't compete with rivals
Yamaha	BD-A1010	£500	⊕	⊕	⊕	2	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊕/⊕	203	4	Universal deck with a few flaws

BLU-RAY EXPLAINED...

MATCHING YOUR DECK TO YOUR AMP

Blu-ray decks are designed to deliver top-notch images (some do it much better than others of course) but Blu-ray is also about enjoying superior quality sound. When choosing a deck, bear in mind the connectivity and decoding features of your amplifier. If it's an older model that doesn't have HDMI inputs then you'll need a BD player with multichannel analogue audio outputs to enjoy hi-res surround sound formats. Most current AVRs have HDMI inputs that accept bitstreamed Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA, but not all receivers can cope with 3D video signals, in which case you'll need a deck with dual HDMI outputs – one for the amp, one for the TV.

Editor's Choice...



SONY
BDP-S790 → £240 Approx

Sony's BDP-790 is the world's first Blu-ray player to feature 4K upscaling. Whether or not that feature turns out to be any use, this range-topping deck still represents a bargain AV purchase. Blu-rays and DVDs are delivered with aplomb, SACD playback is provided, VOD options are extensive and the twin HDMI outputs let you feed dual displays. Another classy disc-spinner from Sony.

Tested: Issue 210
For more info visit: www.sony.co.uk

AV Receivers



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Claimed power	THX	Multi-ch in	HDMI in	HDMI out	3D	Dolby True HD	DTS HD MA	Networking	Net tuner	Issue	Rating	Comment
Anthem	MRX 700	£2,100	7 x 120W	⊖	⊖	4	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖	195	4	Complex set-up, great EQ sound
Arcam	AVR400	£1,700	7 x 90W	⊖	⊕	5	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	194	4	Beautifully built. Ace analogue audio
Denon	AVR-4311	£2,000	9 x 170W	⊖	⊕	6	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	193	5	Polished audio, Airplay streaming
Denon	AVR-1912	£450	7 x 90W	⊖	⊖	6	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	204	3	Lacks gusto and video scaling
Denon	AVR-2311	£800	7 x 135W	⊖	⊖	6	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖	190	4	iPod dock but no networking
Denon	AVR-3312	£1,000	7 x 165W	⊖	⊖	7	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	202	4	New GUI, AirPlay as standard
Marantz	NR1602	£550	7 x 50W	⊖	⊖	4	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	201	5	Slimline AVR is forward-thinking
NAD	T 757	£1,500	7 x 60W	⊖	⊕	4	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖	201	4	Limited features, but superb sound
Onkyo	TX-NR609	£500	7 x 60W	⊕	⊖	6	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	195	5	Comprehensive, stunning performer
Onkyo	TX-NR5009	£2,700	9 x 220W	⊕	⊕	8	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	203	5	Full-blooded 9-channel powerhouse
Onkyo	TX-SR308	£250	5 x 100W	⊖	⊖	3	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖	191	3	Under specified and under powered
Onkyo	TX-NR1009	£1,300	9 x 180W	⊕	⊕	8	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	205	4	Smooth sound; THX Select2
Pioneer	VSX-520	£300	5 x 130W	⊖	⊖	3	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖	191	4	Decent sound; spring-clip terminals
Pioneer	SC-LX83	£2,000	7 x 190W	⊕	⊕	3	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	186	5	Punchy audio with superb control
Pioneer	SC-LX85	£2,000	9 x 190W	⊕	⊕	7	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	205	5	Heady mix of power and features
Pioneer	VSX-922	£500	7 x 150W	⊖	⊖	6	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	209	4	Packed with features, clinical sound
Pioneer	VSX-2021	£800	7 x 150W	⊕	⊕	7	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	200	5	Class-leading control and RoomEQ
T+A	K8	£6,000	7 x 150W	⊖	⊖	3	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	205	4	High-end AVR with built-in BD deck
Yamaha	RXV-3067	£1,500	7 x 140W	⊖	⊕	8	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	194	4	Superb and musical reproduction
Yamaha	RXV-471	£300	5 x 105W	⊖	⊖	4	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖	199	4	Brilliant sounding entry-level AVR
Yamaha	RX-A3010	£2,000	7 x 230W	⊖	⊕	8	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	207	5	The true successor to the Z11
Yamaha	RXV-1067	£850	7 x 105W	⊖	⊕	8	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	190	4	Optimised for cinema. Good connects

Systems



Manufacturer	Model	Price	3D	Claimed power	Configuration	Dolby True HD	DTS HD MA	HDMI in/out	Component	Online portal	Wi-fi ready	Issue	Rating	Comment
Harman/Kardon	BDS800	£1,100	⊖	525W	5.1	⊕	⊕	0/1	⊖	⊖	⊖	194	3	Nil by 1080p24. OK performance
Harman/Kardon	BDS470	£650	⊕	330W	2.1	⊕	⊕	3/1	⊕	⊖	⊖	206	4	Performance-first 2.1 option. 5.1 available
LG	BH8220B	£650	⊕	1,000W	5.1	⊕	⊕	2/1	⊖	⊕	⊕	209	4	Largescale sound but lacks HF finesse
Panasonic	SC-BTT775	£400	⊕	1,000W	5.1	⊕	⊕	2/1	⊖	⊕	⊕	198	3	A decent starter system for AV novices
Panasonic	SC-BTT330	£350	⊕	1,000W	5.1	⊕	⊕	2/1	⊖	⊕	⊕	200	4	Affordable surround sound, old net portal
Panasonic	SC-BTT590	£630	⊕	1,000W	5.1	⊕	⊕	2/1	⊕	⊕	⊕	209	4	New driver tech improves Panny's sound
Samsung	HT-D6750W	£800	⊕	1,300W	5.1	⊕	⊕	2/1	⊕	⊕	⊖	197	3	Claims to be 7.1 but isn't
Samsung	HT-C9950W	£2,000	⊕	1,000W	7.1	⊕	⊕	2/1	⊕	⊕	⊕	190	4	Perfect style match for Samsung's TVs
Samsung	HT-E6750W	£1,000	⊕	1,330W	5.1	⊕	⊕	2/1	⊖	⊕	⊕	208	4	Valve tech adds some warmth to sonics
Sony	BDV-E370	£500	⊕	850W	5.1	⊕	⊕	0/1	⊕	⊕	⊕	187	3	Good sound at low volume; SACD playback
Sony	BDV-E880	£400	⊕	1,000W	5.1	⊕	⊕	2/1	⊖	⊕	⊕	201	3	Full of features but average audio

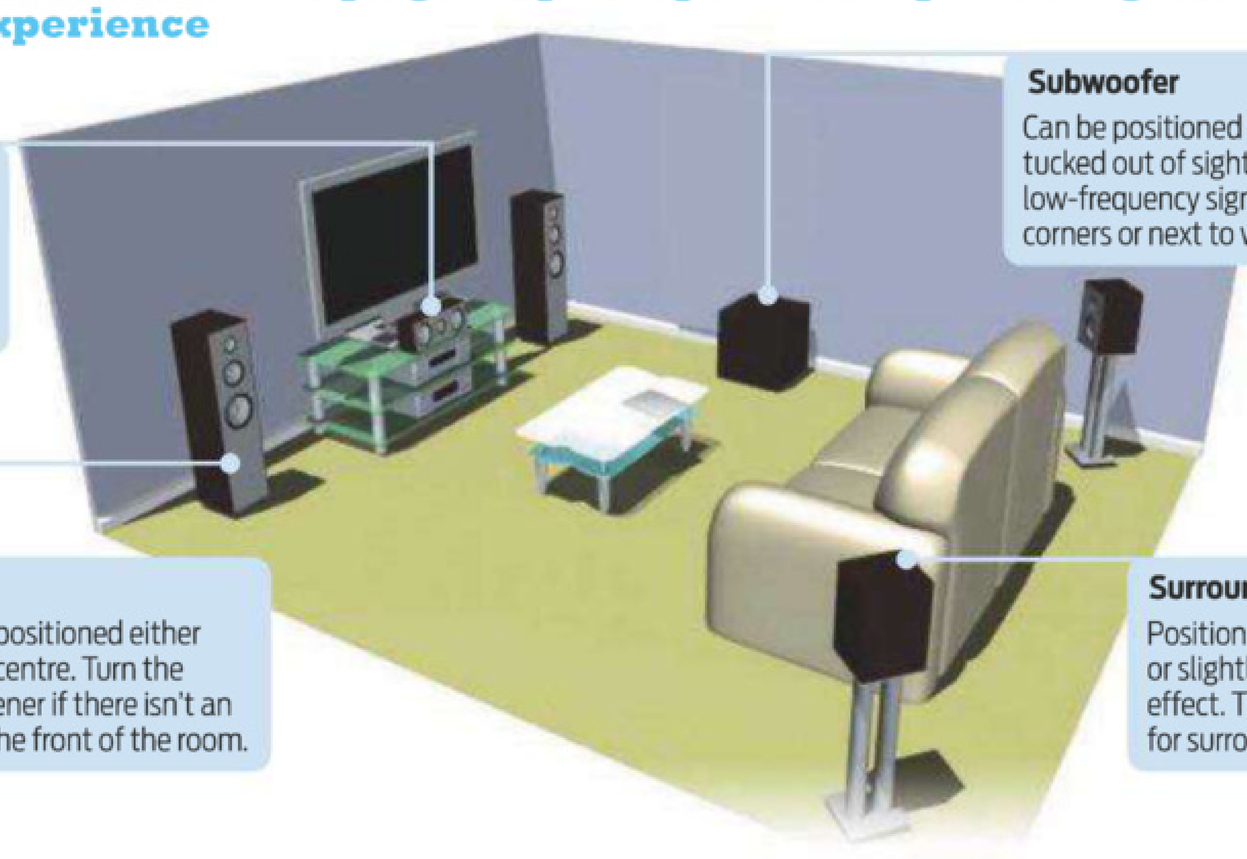
Speakers



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Configuration	Front max power	Rear max power	Centre max power	Sub power	bookshelf	Issue	Rating	Comment
Acoustic Energy	Aegis Neo Max	£1,900	7.1	2 x 200W	2 x 170W	120W	200W	surr	199	1 2 3 4 5	**With 2 x 120W surrounds. An awful lot of speakers for the money**
Acoustic Energy	Compact/Neo	£850	6.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	200W	all	201	1 2 3 4 5	**6.1 system offers solid sonics**
Artcoustic	Spitfire	£21,500	7.5	2 x 250W	2 x 250W	250W	250W	no	200	1 2 3 4 5	**Plus 2 x 150W surrounds. Wall-mountable speakers with might**
Boston Acoustics	A Series	£2,200	5.2	2 x 200W	2 x 200W	175W	250W	no	205	1 2 3 4 5	**Value for money; detail, scale**
Bowers & Wilkins	800 Diamond	£22,500	5.1	2 x 500W	2 x 120W	300W	1,000W	no	196	1 2 3 4 5	**Breathtaking sound, bonkers price**
Cambridge Audio	Minx S325	£800	5.1	2 x 75W	2 x 75W	75W	300W	all	195	1 2 3 4 5	**Extraordinary power for dinky size**
Canton	Chrono CL	£3,600	5.1	2 x 200W	2 x 100W	140W	250W	rear	204	1 2 3 4 5	**Looks and sounds great**
Definitive Technology	Mythos XTR-50	£2,400	3.0	2 x 100W	n/a	100W	n/a	no	202	1 2 3 4 5	**Wall-mountable flatpanel speakers are a classy solution**
Focal	Viva Utopia III	£61,000	5.2	2 x 600W	2 x 600W	600W	Passive	no	207	1 2 3 4 5	**Reference grade. Huge cabinets**
Image Audio	IA 8/5/C	£4,000	5.0	2 x 150W	2 x 150W	300W	n/a	no	195	1 2 3 4 5	**Excellent flat panel speakers**
Jamo	A 101 HCS 5	£250	5.1	2 x 70W	2 x 70W	70W	200W	all	205	1 2 3 4 5	**Budget package does the business**
Jamo	S426 HCS3	£560	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 60W	90W	260W	rear	201	1 2 3 4 5	**Affordable floorstanding array**
KEF	KHT-1505	£500	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	200W	all	205	1 2 3 4 5	**Compact system with agile sub**
KEF	Q Series	£2,400	5.1	2 x 130W	2 x 120w	150W	200W	rear	203	1 2 3 4 5	**Trickle-down tech reaps rewards**
MartinLogan	EM-ESL	£5,300	5.1	2 x 300W	2 x 200W	150W	300W	no	208	1 2 3 4 5	**Detailed, seamless sound. Ace**
Monitor Audio	Gold GX	£7,150	5.1	2 x 200W	2 x 100W	200W	650W	no	202	1 2 3 4 5	**Gorgeous build and sonics**
Paradigm	MilleniaOne	£2,500	5.1	2 x 50W	2 x 50W	50W	300W	all	201	1 2 3 4 5	**Premium-priced sub/sat package**
Paradigm	CT100	£1,150	5.1	2 x 50W	2 x 50W	50W	100W	all	207	1 2 3 4 5	**Small cabinets, clean sound**
PSB	Image Series	£1,500	5.1	2 x 200W	2 x 150W	150W	150W	rear	199	1 2 3 4 5	**Look great, sound tasty**
Revel	Concerta	£3,400	5.1	2 x 150W	2 x 125W	150W	250W	no	206	1 2 3 4 5	**On-wall system, not cheap**
Scandyna	Micropod SE/ The Ball	£900	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	60W	all	200	1 2 3 4 5	**Quirky design married to hi-tech drivers = slick style system**
Tannoy	Definition	£8,200	5.0	2 x 400W	2 x 350W	350W	n/a	rear	197	1 2 3 4 5	**Worth every penny. Bring on the sub**
Tannoy	Mercury V	£1,100	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 50W	70W	300W	rear	207	1 2 3 4 5	**Value-for-money, mature design**
Tannoy	HTS-101	£500	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	100W	all	203	1 2 3 4 5	**Solid-sounding surround package**
Teufel	Theatre 200	£800	5.1	2 x 140W	2 x 150W	140W	250W	all	195	1 2 3 4 5	**Bold sats, sub suffers colouration**
Q Acoustics	Q7000	£800	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	250W	all	204	1 2 3 4 5	**Class-leading sub/sat package**
Wharfedale	DX-1 HCP	£400	5.1	2 x 80W	2 x 80W	100W	150W	all	209	1 2 3 4 5	**Tight sub, potent sats, neat design**

5.1 CLASSIC HOME CINEMA SPEAKER LAYOUT...

Follow these simple rules when laying out your system and you'll be guaranteed a great listening experience



Centre speaker
Handles most of the dialogue and onscreen effects. Should be positioned above or below the screen as close to it as possible.

Subwoofer
Can be positioned wherever it sounds best or can be tucked out of sight due to the non-directional nature of low-frequency signals. Be aware that close positioning in corners or next to walls can create a boomy effect.

Front speakers
Left and right speakers should be positioned either side of the screen, in line with the centre. Turn the speakers in slightly to face the listener if there isn't an even movement of sound across the front of the room.

Surround speakers
Position alongside the listener, pointing in or slightly behind the ears for a good surround effect. The back wall is not a good position for surrounds.

Projectors



Manufacturer	Model	Price (Original)	Type	Resolution	3D	HDMI	Component	12V trigger	Fan noise/dB	lamp life/hr	Issue	Rating	Comment
BenQ	W1100	£900	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	22	2,500	197	1 2 3 4 5	Dynamic images, noisy fan
BenQ	W1000+	£750	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	26	5,000	193	1 2 3 4 5	Performance transcends price
NEW ENTRY BenQ	W1060	£700	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	28	6,000	210	1 2 3 4 5	Lacks solid blacks, but still a bargain
Casio	XJ-A235	£1,000	DLP	1280 x 800	⊖	1	0	0	29	20,000	192	1 2 3 4 5	LED/DLP hybrid. Poor pics
Epson	EH-TW3600	£1,300	LCD	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	22	4,000	193	1 2 3 4 5	Bright pics but average black levels
Epson	MG-850HD	£650	LCD	1,280 x 800	⊖	1	1	0	29	5,000	205	1 2 3 4 5	Offers iPod compatibility
Epson	EH-TW5900	£1,000	LCD	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	0	22	5,000	207	1 2 3 4 5	Great value 3D-ready 1080p PJ
Epson	EH-TW6000	£1,300	LCD	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	0	22	5,000	207	1 2 3 4 5	Better contrast than TW5900
InFocus	SP8600	£800	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	30	2,500	198	1 2 3 4 5	Excellent sub-£1k projector
InFocus	SP8604	£2,500	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	3	1	2	28	3,000	196	1 2 3 4 5	Versatile PJ with decent pictures
JVC	DLA-X3	£3,600	D-ILA	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	1	20	3,000	193	1 2 3 4 5	Aces 2D images, X-talk with 3D
JVC	DLA-X7	£5,550	D-ILA	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	1	20	3,000	195	1 2 3 4 5	Brightness and black level to die for
JVC	DLA-X70	£7,000	D-ILA	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	1	20	3,000	207	1 2 3 4 5	e-Shift tech buffs up 2D video
JVC	DLA-HD990	£9,000	D-ILA	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	19	3,000	185	1 2 3 4 5	Gorgeous with amazing black levels
Optoma	HD67N	£500	DLP	1280 x 720	⊖	1	2	0	29	3,000	194	1 2 3 4 5	With so-so 3D using a 3D-Xl adapter
Optoma	HD20	£900	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	1	2	0	29	4,000	176	1 2 3 4 5	One of the first budget Full HD PJs
Optoma	HD83	£2,400	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	2	22	4,000	203	1 2 3 4 5	3D PJ suffers from limited brightness
Optoma	HD33	£1,350	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	1	25	4,000	204	1 2 3 4 5	Wallet-friendly model supports 3D
Panasonic	PT-AT5000	£3,200	LCD	1920 x 1080	⊕	3	1	2	22	4,000	202	1 2 3 4 5	Good connectivity, superb images
Panasonic	PT-AH1000E	£1,600	LCD	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	2	29	3,000	209	1 2 3 4 5	Solid choice for a 2D living room PJ
Runco	LS-HB	£7,500	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	n/a	2,000	205	1 2 3 4 5	Brilliant PJ for bright environments
Runco	LS-5	£7,500	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	2	2	30	4,000	187	1 2 3 4 5	3-chip performance from one chip
Runco	LS-1	£4,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	n/a	4,000	209	1 2 3 4 5	Not 3D, but otherwise v. impressive
Sanyo	PLV-Z4000	£1,800	LCD	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	2	1	19	3,000	191	1 2 3 4 5	Quiet. Yellow-ish but filmic images
Sharp	XV-Z17000	£4,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	0	n/a	n/a	196	1 2 3 4 5	Living room friendly, 3D impresses
SIM2	MICO 40	£11,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	2	n/a	30,000	189	1 2 3 4 5	Eco-friendly LED-lit and versatile
SIM2	C3X Lumis Uno	£19,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	3	32	2,500	184	1 2 3 4 5	Supreme pics but lacks manual iris
SIM2	Lumis 3D-S	£30,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	3	n/a	3,000	199	1 2 3 4 5	Reference level 3D projector
SIM2	Nero 3D-1	£13,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	3	n/a	3,000	206	1 2 3 4 5	Can't afford the Lumis 3D? Get this
Sony	VPL-VW90ES	£5,400	SXRD	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	1	22	n/a	192	1 2 3 4 5	Great option for a 3D CI build
Sony	VPL-HW20	£2,400	SXRD	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	0	20	n/a	190	1 2 3 4 5	Complex but capable of greatness
Sony	VPL-HW30ES	£3,100	SXRD	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	0	22	n/a	201	1 2 3 4 5	Sony's most affordable 3D offering
Sony	VPL-VW95ES	£5,000	SXRD	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	1	22	n/a	206	1 2 3 4 5	Excellent 2D image, but 3D has flaws
ViewSonic	Pro8200	£900	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	27	3,000	192	1 2 3 4 5	Falters with motion resolution
ViewSonic	Pro8450	£1,500	DLP	1280 x 1200	⊖	1	1	1	27	4,000	202	1 2 3 4 5	3D-ready business PJ lacks Full HD
Vivitek	H5080	£2,700	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	3	1	2	27	2,000	186	1 2 3 4 5	Excellent contrast and colour. Noisy

PROJECTOR SCREENS EXPLAINED...

FIXED FRAME OR ROLL AWAY?

When buying a projector, it's important to think about what screen you're going to partner it with. There are two main approaches – fixed-frame, where the screen is placed in a rigid frame and attached permanently to the wall, or 'roll-away' where it can be rolled up when not in use, including via neat, motorised systems. For the best picture quality and dedicated cinema rooms, fixed frame is preferable, as permanent screens generally stay more tautly stretched and deliver the most accurate pictures. Roll-away screens are more suited to when the room needs to double as a living room. Pricing, of course, varies depending on what size you need.

Editor's Choice...



EPSON
LCD → EH-TW5900
→ £1,000 Approx

The first Full HD 3D projector to launch cost around £5,000 – now Epson will sell you one for less than the price of a 50in TV. Yet while the EH-TW5900 is eminently affordable, it punches well above its weight. Both 2D and 3D pics impress, and setup is a doddle.

Tested: Issue 207
For more info visit: www.epson.co.uk

Storemags.com

Media Players



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Type	HDD	3D	HDMI	DLNA	Online portal	USB playback	Wi-fi ready	Issue	Rating	Comment	
AC Ryan	PlayOn! HD Essential	£130	Player	1TB	⊖	1	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊕	194	4	No wired Ethernet option, so you have to network via wi-fi dongle	
AC Ryan	PlayOn! HD 2	£150	Player	1TB	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	202	4	Well featured and a good performer	
AC Ryan	Veolo	£170	Player	⊖	⊖	1	⊖	⊕	⊕	⊕	210	3	Good file support but handset and UI frustrate	NEW ENTRY
Boxee	Boxee Box	£200	VOD	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊕	193	3	iPlayer access. Browser is a pain to use	
Buffalo	Linkstation Pro LS-VL	£170	NAS	1TB	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊖	192	4	Speedy and reliable with Bit Torrent client. 1.5TB and 2TB versions are also available	
Crystal Acoustics	PICOHD5.1	£50	Player	⊖	⊖	1	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	199	3	Small, no frills media player	
Crystal Acoustics	Media Matchbox	£55	Player	⊖	⊖	1	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	202	5	Extensive file support includes lossless audio and BD ISOs. Keenly priced, ultra portable	
Digital Stream	DPS-1000	£90	Player	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	196	4	Good for VOD services, no optical out	
Eminent	EM7285	£165	Player	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	209	4	Wide file support, user-generated App centre	
Iomega	Screenplay MX	£140	Player	1TB	⊖	1	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	194	4	No optical audio out or hi-res audio	
Iomega	TV with Boxee	£210	NAS	1TB	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	209	4	Boxee interface, decent VOD services	
iXtreamer	iXtreamer	£150	NAS	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	199	5	Slick player with space for SATA HDD	
Maxell	MMB300	£150	Player	⊖	⊖	1	⊖	⊕	⊕	⊕	210	3	Good Android OS and web browsing, no DLNA	NEW ENTRY
Netgear	NeoTV 550	£120	Player	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	210	4	Wi-Fi not built in, but otherwise a solid offering	NEW ENTRY
Netgear	ReadyNAS NVX	£500	NAS	1TB	⊖	0	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	185	4	Tank-like NAS can accommodate up to 8TB of storage – a serious bit of hardware	
Popbox	Popbox 3D	£140	Player	⊖	⊕	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	199	4	Offers BBC iPlayer and MKV3D file support	
Sony	SMP-N200	£70	Player	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	210	4	Excellent VOD, but no FLAC or DivX support	NEW ENTRY
Synology	USB Station 2	£85	Player	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊖	193	4	Simply add your own USB hard disks	
Synology	DS410	£400	Player	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊖	190	4	Accommodates up to 8TB of SATA drives	
Teufel	MediaStation 6	£270	Player	1TB	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	200	2	Freeview HD toting player has hideous UI	
Toshiba	Stor.E TV+	£170	Player	1TB	⊖	1	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊖	195	3	Tosh's cute unit supports a wide range of formats	
WD	WD TV Live Hub	£200	Player	1TB	⊖	1	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊕	190	5	Superb multi-format player	
WD	WD TV Mini	£48	Player	⊖	⊖	0	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	189	5	Tiny media player lacks HDMI output	

HOME CINEMA Choice

ISSUE #212 ON SALE Aug 23

In the next issue

The future of cinema sound Behind-the-scenes with sonic pioneers Datasat
Blu-ray with bite Spielberg's *Jaws* finally swims to shore in hi-def
Premium projector Does SIM2's M.150 set a new standard for bigscreen 3D?

On test

BOWERS & WILKINS MT60 5.1 home cinema speaker package ONKYO TX-NR616 New-look mid-range AV receiver SONY KDL-46HX753 Bravia LED TV PANASONIC TX-P65VT50 Giant-sized plasma TV ROUNDUP Five AirPlay speakers go head-to-head PLUS In-depth news, Blu-ray reviews and more

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Recorders



Manufacturer	Model	Price (*plus subscription)	Type	HDD/GB	HDMI	Component	Scart	USB Media	Online portal	Wi-fi ready	Issue	Rating	Comment
Panasonic	DMR-PWT500	£400	F'view HD	320	1	0	0	⊕	⊕	⊕	202	4	BD/PVR combi needs bigger HDD
Echostar	HDS-600RS	£350	F'sat HD	500	1	0	2	⊕	⊕	⊖	196	4	Solid PVR with built-in SlingPlayer feature
Panasonic	DMR-BWT700	£500	F'view HD	320	1	0	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	197	4	Complex with Blu-ray recorder and 3D player
Sagemcom	DTR67320T	£150	F'view	320	1	1	2	⊕	⊖	⊖	201	5	No HD tuners, but can import/export media
Samsung	BD-E8500	£400	F'view HD	500	1	0	0	⊕	⊕	⊕	207	5	'Smart' PVR with 3D BD drive – v. convenient
Samsung	BD-DT7800	£280	F'view HD	500	1	1	0	⊕	⊕	⊕	201	4	Can't record two channels at once
Sony	SVR-HDT1000	£350	F'view HD	1TB	1	0	0	⊕	⊖	⊖	204	4	Large HDD; iPlayer but no Sony hub
Toshiba	HDR5010	£200	F'view HD	500	3	1	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	201	4	Good twin-tuner offering, but no iPlayer yet
TVonics	DTR-Z500HD	£225	F'view HD	500	3	0	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	201	4	Firmware has added BBC iPlayer

Subwoofers



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Sealed/ported	Power (RMS)	Frequency response/Hz	Driver size	Dimensions/ (w x h x d)mm	Weight/kg	Issue	Rating	Comment
BK Electronics	XXLS400DF	£410	S	400W	19-120	12in	400 x 460 x400	28	196	5	Clean and tight; great value
Bowers & Wilkins	DB1	£3,250	S	1,000W	17-45	12in x 2	460 x 490 x 410	44	197	5	Bipolar arrangement, ripping
Paradigm	SUB1	£5,000	S	1,700W	35-150	8in x 6	505 x 516 x 455	50	197	4	Unorthodox hexagonal shape
REL	G1	£3,300	S	600W	15@-6dB	12in	572 x 464 x 660	49	208	5	Ultra potent; warm, rich sound
SV Sound	PC 12 Plus DSP	£1,250	P	800W	10-150	12.5in	1,022 x 407	39	198	4	Cylindrical sub for big spaces
Tannoy	TS2.12	£550	S	500W	21@-6dB	12in	430 x 440 x 378	18	208	5	Extra passive cone adds depth
Velodyne	DD18+	£5,800	S	1,250W	8.8-300	18in	530 x 580 x 650	65	197	5	Huge 18in driver, muscular sound
Velodyne	EQ-Max12	£800	P	225W	25-120	12in	416 x 454 x 457	28	204	5	EQ system makes placement easy
Velodyne	SPL-800 Ultra	£1,150	S	1,200W	16-240	8in	267 x 280 x 356	33	201	5	Compact but potent; nice finish
Wharfedale	SPC-10	£300	S	215W	35-120	10in	352 x 382 x 305	11	202	3	Affordable, but lacks grunt

Soundbars



	Manufacturer	Model	Price	Power	Separate sub	Sub power	HDMI in	HDMI out	Dolby True HD	DTS HD MA	Dimensions/ (w x h x d)mm	Weight/kg	Issue	Rating	Comment
NEW ENTRY	Boston Acoustics	TVee M30	£450	300W	⊕	N/A	0	0	⊖	⊖	966 x 146 x 80	NA	210	4	Wireless sub, excellent build
	LG	HLX-56S	£750	210W	⊕	150W	2	1	⊕	⊕	1000 x 95 x 207	6.8	204	4	Stylish and full of features
	Orbitsound	T12v3	£300	100W	⊕	80W	0	0	⊖	⊖	605 x 100 x 110	NA	206	4	Wide stereo spread, no HDMI
NEW ENTRY	Panasonic	SC-HTB550	£400	120W	⊕	120W	2	1	⊕	⊕	956 x 102 x 74	1.6	210	4	Hybrid 'bar/2.1, good bass
	Samsung	HW-E551	£400	160W	⊕	150W	2	1	⊕	⊕	1038 x 55 x 55	1.7	209	4	Average audio, clever design
	Yamaha	YSP-2200	£800	132W	⊕	100W	3	1	⊕	⊕	435 x 137 x 350	6	196	4	Effective surround sound

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Introducing the best sounding Blu-ray universal player yet!

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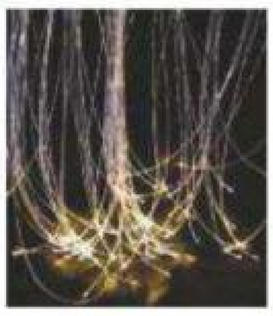
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Photo: Artcoustic SA and Sphere Custom Design

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POINT OF VIEW

Having watched too many sci-fi movies, **Richard Stevenson** lives in fear of a future where our 'net-connected hardware grinds to a halt

The end of the world (of home cinema) is nigh. I have seen the omens and portents, and the shape of the beast is that of a toaster. To be precise, it's a toaster that carries a database of bread products and, buoyed with a knowledge of all things baked, will serve up perfectly browned toasted products whether you pop-in a frozen bagel or a slice of Hovis. And it's networked to ensure an up-to-date repository of bready knowledge, and to keep its firmware at the cutting edge of, er, toasting technology. Remember the episode of *Red Dwarf* where Talkie Toaster almost killed the crew? That wasn't fiction, that was a premonition.

Flood of firmware

Processor-based electronic architecture, as opposed to the largescale integrated circuit, has underpinned almost every key development in consumer electronic goods over the last 10 years. Blu-ray players to TVs, personal audio players to smartphones, they all owe their existence to the holy trinity of a processor chip, firmware and software. Network these devices and they can be updated, upgraded and even fixed by firmware and software patches. These gadgets are so complex that mistakes and 'bugs' are inevitable, making the ability to update firmware an essential ingredient in today's high street hardware. So why not extend the benefit to other complex systems? Despite the lack of enthusiasm for the rash of internet fridges launched a few years back, domestic appliances and small kitchen gizmos will be the next household items to commonly use a core processor with updateable firmware.

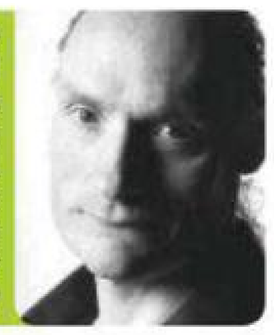
And that's when it's all going to implode. Right here, right now, I have more than 20 networked CE products at home and their thirst for updates seems insatiable. It has already got to the point where I need to give my home cinema system a half-hour's notice to watch a movie. Every time I power it up, the BD spinner, AV processor, TV, server, Freesat box and iPad all need to download new firmware. By the time we are ready to dim the lights (assuming the Lutron controller doesn't fancy an update) the popcorn is stone cold.

It came to a head last month when the missus and I returned from a holiday. We planned to top off a relaxing week with a bottle of something red and a good movie. We didn't manage it. The combined software updates required after leaving the system switched off for seven days wiped out the entire evening. If the current crop of kit I own is anything to go by, firmware updates are getting ever bigger and ever more regular.

Now then, fast-forward a few years to a time when every single electronic or electrical device in your home uses processor/firmware architecture. Networked fridges and washing machines are already available, small domestic appliances with Wi-Fi and a desire for knowledge are on the way. But **if I ever have to wait five minutes for a firmware update before my kettle boils water I am going to go seriously postal**.

No one seems in much of a hurry to drastically improve rural broadband speeds, leaving people outside of major conurbations on the verge of electronic meltdown. And what would you get when this combined demand for firmware data exceeded the maximum capacity of your broadband connection? A critical impasse, where all your devices would go into firmware update mode, but not actually get the data quickly enough to achieve the patch before the next update was available, thus tipping every electronic or electrical device in your home into silent, permanent, cataclysmic oblivion. Mark my words – Talkie Toaster really will cause the end of the world...

Is all your AV hardware connected to the internet? Let us know via letters@homecinemachoice.com



Countryphile **Richard Stevenson** has moaned so often about rural broadband that we've now asked him to consider moving to a city

ILLUSTRATION: BY TEKURA MAEVA

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